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Context is key:

Perceptions of the risky nature of romantic relationships and
the use of available context in evaluation of relational transgressions.

by

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Abstract

In an experiment predicated on the assumption that perceived risk elicits a cautious mode of cognitive processing (Boon & Holmes, 1999), I tested the hypothesis that thoughts of risk and accompanying feelings of vulnerability affect people's impressions of the diagnostic value of disambiguating context and thus whether or not such context will be used in the inference process. Participants evaluated the events and actors described in a relational transgression concerning perceived violation of norms regarding relationship exclusivity. I varied the type of background context participants received (no additional context, extenuating context, negative "aggravating" context) as well as whether or not the risky nature of romantic relationships was salient while they processed such information. As predicted, context strongly influenced participants evaluations of a relational transgression, however evidence for the effect of risk on the use of additional contextual information was weak.

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Dedication

To my husband, Darryl, who continues to stand firmly beside me after eight years, with unending support, faith, and love. You have been my research guinea pig, my editor, my sounding board, my cookie-maker, and my most enthusiastic cheerleader. You have always encouraged me to be the very best I can be. Thank you for being you, for choosing everyday to share your life with me, and for doing so much to create a happy, warm, loving home for us to share.

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And finally, this work is dedicated to the loving memory of my first teacher, my “Papa”, William McLeod. He didn’t just teach me to read and write when I was three, he also taught me to love the world of books and learning. We both took the same roundabout road to knowledge, but I know I appreciate what I have learned so much more because of it. Thank you Papa, for teaching and loving me so much in our six short years together.

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Context is key:

Perceptions of the risky nature of romantic relationships and
the use of available context in evaluation of relational transgressions.

Most of us will be involved in a romantic relationship at some point in our lives. While the fairytales of our childhood would have us believe that all we need to do is find that special someone in order to live “happily ever after”, in the real world the road to relationship bliss is fraught with considerable risk.

Social psychological definitions of “risk” and theories about how risk operates have their roots in the sciences of mathematics and economics (e.g., Lopes, 1987). The present research views risk in more concrete terms, however. In particular, I adopted a perspective that considers as risks those behaviours, events, issues, and concerns that cause people to experience feelings of vulnerability in their relationships (e.g., increasing interdependence) and / or which constitute potential sources of threat to relationship stability (e.g., disproportionate levels of commitment). This treatment is consistent with the results of recent research (e.g., Boon & Pasveer, 1999) that examined intimates’ experiences of risk in romantic relationships. Participants in this study identified a large and varied sample of risks they had encountered in their intimate partnerships, including risks associated with the possibility of breaking up, fear of being negatively evaluated, self-disclosure, concerns about relationship exclusivity, increases in independence / dependence, and power imbalances.

The literature on risk, defined in this way, is sparse. With the exception of Boon and Holmes (1999), previous research has focused primarily on people’s responses to

direct, obvious and personal threats to their own relationship (such as the presence of an attractive, alternative partner). Such studies have found that, when their own relationship is directly threatened, participants engage in a type of biased processing is known as “reassurance seeking” (a term coined by Boon and Holmes, 1999). Reassurance seeking involves efforts to defuse the threat by reinterpreting, reconstruing, and emphasizing the positive aspects of the partner and the relationship while simultaneously reassuring yourself and those around you that all is well with your relationship (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Murray & Holmes, 1993; Murray & Holmes, 1994; Simpson, Ickes, & Blackstone, 1995).

Such reassurance-seeking responses however, may not generalize to all types of threat, and may be unique to those situations in which the threat to the relationship is direct and obvious. Indeed, there are at least three problems with the assumption that intimates always engage in reassurance seeking behaviours when faced with threats to their relationships.

Not Every Relationship is a Happy One

First, we cannot assume that exposure to threat always results in relationship-maintaining or enhancing cognitions. This may be more true for those involved in happy relationships, but in real life not every relationship is a happy one. For those couples who are already experiencing unhappiness and doubts, exposure to threat seems more likely to exacerbate their feelings of distress than to alleviate their already existing concerns about their partner and their relationship. Consistent with this hypothesis, several studies have found that those who are unhappy in their relationships tend to exhibit more caution and skepticism when considering potential excuses for their partner’s transgressions (i.e.,

Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1987). Importantly, Holmes and Rempel's (1989) work indicates that this increase in caution and skepticism is even more pronounced when the risks inherent in relationships are highlighted.

Repeated Threats: When You Just Cannot Defend Him/Her Anymore

It also seems likely that there is a limit to people's ability, or perhaps willingness, to counter serious, recurring threats to their relationships in relationship-enhancing (i.e., reassurance seeking) ways. After meeting repeated instances of threat (e.g., "he is always staring at other women and making suggestive comments about them") with efforts at reassurance seeking (e.g., "this strengthens my confidence in his fidelity because no matter how much he looks, he always comes home with me"), an individual's faith and trust in the partner may begin to erode (e.g., "he is just biding his time with me until someone better looking is willing to replace me"). When such doubts begin to surface, we can expect that desires for caution may override reassurance seeking, resulting in the offended partner becoming more pessimistic or cynical about the other's attitudes and behaviours (e.g., "he has no respect for women except to ogle their bodies, which is disrespectful to me").

Indirect Risks Inherent in Romantic Relationships

Finally, I would like to argue that reassurance seeking may not occur when the threat to participants is more subtle and indirect (I will hereafter refer to these indirect threats as "risks"). Because the direct, personal threats used in previous studies are easily perceived, participants are able to mobilize their defences and begin to generate reassurance seeking cognitions designed to defuse the threat. In real life, however, we are often exposed to evidence that implies in a subtle, indirect fashion that relationships

are risky. Most of us have watched a close family member or friend's relationship dissolve. Television programming abounds with accounts, both real-life and fictional, of romantic relationships gone sour. Newspaper articles expose us to the fact that, although the divorce rate in Canada is dropping, the number of people getting married is also declining (Divorce rate falls, 1999). These vivid testimonies to the risks inherent in relationships are a part of our everyday lives. To the extent that past research has focused almost exclusively on participants' reactions to direct threats to their own relationships (e.g., the presence of an attractive alternative who appears to be available and interested in your partner), it remained an empirical question whether more subtle, insidious threats also elicit reassurance-seeking or whether people might respond to such threats in ways that do not bolster their confidence in their relationships.

Boon and Holmes (1999) found that when people were exposed to risk more indirectly (e.g., reading a narrative about another couple's break up), they tended to become more skeptical and cautious in their thinking. The result of this shift to a more cautious form of processing was evidenced in a propensity to evaluate relationship transgressions and their perpetrators more harshly as well as refraining from extending the benefit of the doubt to the perpetrator. The present study has its roots in this work and was designed to examine one of the ways in which indirect exposure to risk could shift people's thought processing in a more cautious direction, namely through influencing how people use additional context information.

Indirect, Inherent Risks:

A Cautious Processing Response

Boon and Holmes' (1999) model of cautious processing is based on the premise that when risk is primed in an indirect manner, for example by reading an account of the painful break-up of someone else's relationship, it activates those aspects of individuals' general relationship schemas that are related to thoughts and feelings associated with risk. More specifically, although any type of risk, be it direct threatening or indirectly perceived, may activate these schemas, Boon and Holmes argue that exposure to indirect risk (i.e., individuals do not see it coming), is unlikely to mobilize people to prepare the kinds of refutational reassurance-seeking cognitions they would have had they been directly, overtly, and personally threatened. Instead, once activated in an indirect fashion, thoughts and feelings related to risk are thought to elicit "fears of invalidity".

When You Cannot Afford to be Wrong

"Fear of invalidity" (Kruglanski, 1990) refers to individuals' concerns about making a decision or drawing an inference and being wrong, particularly in situations where there are substantial penalties for making an incorrect choice. Kruglanski found that when caution is warranted, such as when perceptions of risk are highlighted and people must make an inference of some kind, fear of invalidity will encourage them to "unfreeze" their thought processes. This means they will attempt to collect as much evidence as they possibly can. This evidence will be used to thoroughly test their beliefs (e.g., about a person's blameworthiness) before they make a final judgement. This allows them to avoid making erroneous inferences based on a limited amount of untested information.

Depending on the consequences attached to various kinds of erroneous inferences, individuals' fears about making the wrong decision and having to suffer those consequences may lead them to focus their information search in a particular direction. If so, the direction they choose will likely be the one that best protects them from further hurtful consequences, such as the pain suffered when someone whom you decided to forgive hurts you again. According to Kruglanski (1990), this type of directed search reflects a "need for specific closure".

Take the issue of forgiveness for example. Individuals may try to avoid making certain types of inferences (i.e., that the partner deserves to be forgiven) due to fear of invalidity because, if they are wrong, they have opened themselves up to potentially being hurt again by their partner in the future. Individuals faced with a choice like this may prefer to err on the side of not forgiving a partner who may truly deserve forgiveness, rather than set themselves up for more pain by forgiving a partner who may not deserve it. By "unfreezing" their thought processes, people in this situation can search out and examine as much evidence as they need until they feel comfortable making the final decision.

In conjunction with this cautious approach to evaluations (which increases the amount of information gathering and hypothesis testing that occurs), Boon and Holmes argue that people may also employ more stringent criteria when deciding whether to accept or reject the information they gather. This is similar to the idea of controlling for Type One error in statistical analysis. Often, researchers would prefer to err on the side of not finding an effect that truly exists than take the chance of proclaiming a major finding that may actually be due to chance. In order to do this, researchers employ a

more stringent criteria, or alpha level, when deciding whether or not a particular effect is significant.

In much the same way, individuals who have reason to be concerned that they may be hurt again by a partner's transgressions (i.e., because their thoughts are focused on the risks that romantic relationships entail) may also develop more stringent criteria for evaluating the information they are presented with. They may demand that the information be extremely clear, relevant, and strong. They may also want considerably more evidence before drawing a conclusion than they would have had they not been given reason for concern (i.e., not been exposed to risk and had their fear of invalidity heightened).

The Role of Context:

Extending the Cautious Processing Model

The present study extended Boon and Holmes (1999) by examining one way in which perceived risk may elicit cautious processing, that is through its influence on individuals' use of disambiguating contextual information. Very few real-life accounts of transgressions are told without some amount of context being included in the recounting. Some of that context may be positive or exculpatory, some negative or aggravating. The question is how do we decide what to use, when to use it, and when not to?

Gilbert (1989) suggests that making inferences is a two-stage process. According to his model of social inference, when an event occurs our first reaction is to make a dispositional inference. For example, we may initially attribute the uncontrollable screams of a little girl to her mother's inability to discipline a spoiled child. It is only if we have motivation, resources, and time to do so, that we move on to the second stage of

inference. In this second stage, we begin to take situational factors into account in order to either confirm or “correct” our initial inferences.

I would like to argue that additional information or context may be used in determining whether or not an adjustment to the initial dispositional inference is necessary. For example, once we learn that a celebrity is appearing at the mall that day and that mother and child were just pushed into the wall by an unruly mob of teenaged fans we may have to rethink our inference. Because it was a situational factor (i.e., the child was scared and hurt) and not inability or unwillingness to discipline a wilful child that caused the screaming to occur, we may decide that based on the context in which the situation occurred, we should correct our initial inference about the mother’s personality and parenting skills.

The question then becomes, how do we decide what information is worth considering and what is not? Are there differences in our propensities to believe and accept information that excuses or explains a behaviour as opposed to that which condemns another’s actions? How do we use context when we are asked to judge others, particularly in situations where the action is a transgression and the evaluation in question is morality-based (e.g., blameworthiness, responsibility, dishonesty, untrustworthiness)?

How Easy it is to Fall from Grace

Research by Reeder and Brewer (1979) suggests that inferences concerning morality-based dispositional characteristics operate on a continuum. Take “dishonesty”, for example. Reeder and Brewer argue that a person who is completely dishonest (e.g., scoring a seven on a “dishonesty” continuum) is not restricted to acting dishonestly. In other words, given the right incentive, a truly dishonest person may act in an honest way

towards others. However, this one honest act would not normally lead perceivers to change their minds about the individual's dishonest character. On the other hand, those who are completely honest (e.g., scoring a one on the "dishonesty" continuum) are much more restricted in the types of behaviours that are expected of them. Simply put, those who are considered to be very honest are expected to behave honestly at all times, with no exceptions, and if they do not, perceivers are quick to alter their beliefs about the individual's honest character.

If, as Reeder and Brewer believe, a person is placed on the dishonesty continuum based on the most extreme behaviour they exhibit, then those who are initially seen to be very honest must monitor their subsequent actions carefully, lest they lose the positive regard of others. Why? To recap the arguments introduced above, if a person is thought to be dishonest, one honest behaviour on his or her part is generally not enough to alter that perception. However, if a person who is thought to be honest acts dishonestly (i.e., lies about something important to his or her partner), this one dishonest action is sufficient to alter people's evaluations of him or her.

Accordingly, a single dishonest act may be seen as so highly indicative or diagnostic of the person's "true" personality that a person formerly thought honest may topple from his or her pedestal as a result of that single action. To explain the phenomenon, researchers (Martijn, Spears, Van Der Pligt, & Jakobs, 1992; Reeder and Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987) have argued that, at least when judgements about moral character are at issue, moral acts (i.e., honest behaviours) are viewed as less diagnostic of character than are immoral acts (i.e., dishonest behaviours).

Based on this line of logic, I propose that, compared to negative information (i.e., which may bring a person's moral fibre into question), positive information (i.e., that which confirms a person's good standing as a moral person) may be given less credence when presented as evidence. Past research (Martijn et al, 1992; Reeder and Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987) has demonstrated that positive information of this nature is often seen as less diagnostic or meaningful than is negative information (otherwise one honest act would be enough to shift people's perceptions of a dishonest person). Negative actions or condemnatory information, on the other hand, may be seen as very important and much more diagnostic of a person's character.

Fear of invalidity may increase individuals' reluctance to use positive or exculpatory information. When the thoughts and feelings associated with the risks inherent to romantic involvement are salient, individuals may not want to chance, for example, basing their decision to forgive upon exculpatory information unless such information is crystal clear, directly relevant to the situation at hand, and abundant in quantity. In other words, if perceived risk makes individuals concerned about making certain kinds of inferential errors (i.e., the kind that could potentially result in hurt and pain), tendencies to view positive, exculpatory information as somewhat low in diagnostic value may be enhanced. Negative information, on the other hand, may be even more readily accepted (i.e., believed and utilized in decision-making) when risk is salient because fear of invalidity may enhance people's tendencies to view negative or condemning information as diagnostic of a person's character and their deservedness of blame.

This theory is supported in part by Alicke (2000) who suggested that when a negative event occurs, people automatically seek to lay blame. When this default reaction occurs, three things happen. First, we exaggerate the perpetrator's ability to control the situation, deeming the actor as having more control over the situation than perhaps is true. Second, we lower our standards of criteria for accepting evidence of blameworthiness, that is, we are much less likely to accept extenuating or mitigating contextual information than we are context that indicates blameworthiness. Third, we actively seek information that will support an inference of blame. As you can see, the last two of these steps are extremely similar to our expectations for a link between exposure to risk and use of available context in regards to evaluations of transgressions and of the additional context itself.

The present study examined whether perceived risk elicits cautious processing by altering people's criteria for evaluating and using additional contextual information. For example, we examined whether or not perceived risk increases how stringent people's criteria (i.e., relevance, clarity) are for deciding whether to use or disregard contextual information when making judgements about relational transgressions.

Overview and Hypotheses

This study used a 2 Risk (risk versus control) x 3 Context (extenuating, aggravating, no context) between-subjects factors design. Participants first read one of two narratives, one which described the painful break-up of a romantic relationship (intended to highlight the risks involved in being in a romantic relationships) or one which described a how a couple met and began dating (control narrative). They then read an account of a transgression that had taken place in a stranger's romantic relationship.

Next, two thirds of participants were given additional contextual information concerning the transgression. One third of participants received additional extenuating context, that is, information that was potentially exculpatory or which served to make the offending partner appear less blameworthy. One third of participants received aggravating context. This included information that served to make the offending partner appear more blameworthy. Finally, one third of participants did not receive additional context (no context control). After reading these materials, participants evaluated the transgression, the perpetrator, and the quality and usefulness of the additional context they were given. Finally, everyone was asked to recall as much of the manipulation (i.e., risk or control) narrative as possible. The following hypotheses are based on the effects of risk and context on participants' evaluations of the transgression account, the perpetrator, and the additional contextual information some participants received. They are broken down by type of effect and within each of those, by evaluations of the transgression or of the context.

H₁: Main Effect of Risk

Evaluations of the transgression. Compared to the control group, I expected risk participants to exhibit more negative mood and to be more pessimistic and cautious in both their general relationship beliefs and their evaluations of the transgression narrative and the offending partner. These hypotheses are based on Boon and Holmes (1999) and are intended to replicate their finding that exposure to risk shifts participants mood, beliefs about relationships, and perceptions of a relational transgression in significantly more negative directions.

Evaluations of the context. The work of Kruglanski (1989) indicated that I should expect participants who were exposed to the risk narrative to be the most susceptible to the influence of additional contextual information. I expected that as a result, risk participants would pay more attention to the quality (i.e., relevance, clarity) of the additional context they were given than would control participants. I also expected risk participants, as opposed to controls, to show a marked tendency toward higher scores on the hypothesis testing items, that is, wanting more information and desiring to ask further questions of the offending partner.

H₂: Main Effect of Context

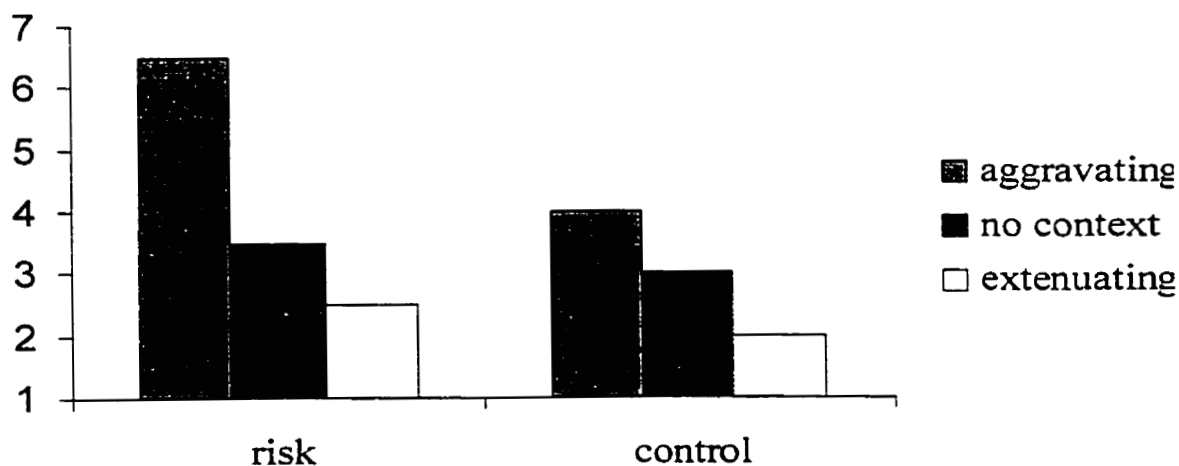
Evaluations of the transgression. I predicted that participants who received additional aggravating context would be more pessimistic than either the extenuating or no context groups in their evaluations of the transgression narrative, as well as their evaluations of the offending partner. Participants who received extenuating context were expected to be the least pessimistic on these dimensions with the no context group's results falling somewhere in-between.

Evaluations of the context. Based on Reeder and Brewer's (1979) suggestion that positive information is not as influential in people's judgements of the character of others as negative information is, I expected that aggravating context (i.e., that which makes the offending partner appear more blameworthy) would be seen as more informative and diagnostic than extenuating context (i.e., that which makes the offending partner appear less blameworthy). Because they received no additional information, participants in the no context condition were not included in the analysis of this hypothesis.

H₃: Risk x Context Interaction.

I also predicted a risk by context interaction which would qualify the main effects described above. Because exposure to risk heightens their “fear of invalidity” and consequently their need to test hypotheses, I predicted that perceived risk would diminish participants’ tendencies to make more charitable attributions in the extenuating as opposed to the no context condition, while increasing participants’ tendencies to draw more cautious and unforgiving attributions in the aggravating context condition (Risk x Context interaction). In other words, I expected that exposure to risk would diminish the influence extenuating context would have on participants’ evaluations, but increase the influence of any aggravating context they were presented with. Control participants, on the other hand, would show significantly smaller differences in the amount of influence that context had over their evaluations of transgressions. A similar pattern was expected for the evaluations of the context statements.

Figure 1. Predicted interaction between risk and context



Research Questions

RQ₁: Context and hypothesis testing. It is unclear whether or not I should have expected there to be differences in participants' responses to the hypothesis testing items based on the types of context that participants' received. It is possible that those who received aggravating context would be less inclined to require more information before passing judgement on the situation (as per Reeder and Brewer, 1979). Those who receive extenuating context on the other hand, may indeed want more information, particularly more negative information, to ensure that they have the "full picture" before making a final decision. These possibilities could also be qualified by exposure to risk.

RQ₂: Recall task. Since participants were asked to recall as much of the risk or control narrative as they could, this information may shed further light on how individuals process information about risk. In general, the literature on memory indicates that people are more likely to remember gist than actual phrasing (Brewer, 1977). That is, they are more likely to recall the flavour of what they read as opposed to the accurate wording of the information (e.g., more often recalling "they had been together for over a year" as opposed to "they had been together for fourteen months").

Another phenomenon we might expect to observe is the inclusion of "intrusion errors", that is information that is recalled but is not actually present in the narrative (Johnson, Bransford, & Solomon, 1973). For example, when recalling the risk narrative, participants may "recall" having read that Stephen had found another girlfriend. This information is not included in, or even alluded to, in the risk narrative.

Investigation into the patterns of recall exhibited by participants in this study was strictly exploratory. I anticipated that differences in recall between the risk and control

groups would exist due, at least in part, to the risk narrative being more emotionally involving than the control narrative. Given that little, if any, research has been conducted on the influence of risk perceptions on ability to recall narrative however, the exact ways in which these potential differences would manifest themselves was unknown.

Method

Pilot Studies

Four pilot studies were conducted in preparation for this study. They were designed to accomplish several goals pertaining to the transgression account, the context statements, and the risk/control narratives. The first goal was to determine how negatively participants would perceive the transgression account. The second goal was to ascertain how aggravating or extenuating participants viewed the context statements to be and to construct additional context statements based on the types of information the participants themselves felt would make the perpetrator appear more or less blameworthy. In conjunction with this second goal, it was also important to determine how informative and influential each piece of contextual information was perceived to be in order to match the aggravating and extenuating context statements on level of intensity. Finally, it was important to the success of this study that participants respond differently to the risk and control narratives. The third goal of pilot testing therefore, was to determine whether the reading the risk narrative (used in previous research by Boon and Holmes, 1999) would temporarily increase participants' negative mood and shift their general relationship beliefs in a more pessimistic direction, as compared to the new and untested control narrative.

Pilot Study #1. The first pilot study was designed to determine whether participants perceived the transgression account (excluding additional context) to be negative, to ascertain how aggravating or extenuating the context statements were seen to be, and to elicit from participants suggestions for additional context statements. In order to determine whether the incident was indeed seen to be a transgression, participants ($N = 23$) were asked to evaluate the account on dimensions such as negativity of the incident,

blameworthiness of the perpetrator, and amount of damage inflicted on the relationship. All evaluations were made using a seven-point Likert scale. Lower scores on the negativity item indicated a more negative evaluation of the incident. Higher scores on the remaining two items indicated more blame and damage to the relationship. Mean scores indicated that participants saw the incident as negative ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .72$), the perpetrator as moderately blameworthy ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.51$), and the relationship as somewhat damaged ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.50$). These findings indicated that participants were viewing the incident reported in the account as a negative transgression.

Four of the context statements (two aggravating and two extenuating) used in this pilot study came in part from the author of the transgression account himself, while the remaining context statements were created by the researchers. After reading and rating the transgression account, participants were then asked to rate the twelve aggravating and eleven extenuating context statements. Participants rated each context statement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely extenuating / not at all aggravating) to 5 (not at all extenuating / extremely aggravating). As expected, participants indicated that the twelve aggravating statements made the perpetrator appear more blameworthy ($M = 4.05$, $SD = .75$), while the eleven extenuating statements made the perpetrator appear less blameworthy ($M = 1.99$, $SD = .79$).

Participants were then asked what, if any, information was not included in the narrative that they felt would have allowed them to be more confident in making their evaluations. Suggestions for changes to the transgression account included more information about the relationship between the victim and perpetrator (i.e., length of relationship, level of seriousness, characters' ages) and clarification of where the

transgression took place (many participants did not know “Queen’s” referred to a university nor that it was not located in Toronto). As well, participants were also asked what information we could have provided them with that would have made the perpetrator appear more or less blameworthy. Many participants believed that if the perpetrator were to actively deter the victim from asking questions, he would appear more blameworthy for what happened (i.e., if he were to dissuade her from accompanying him on his trip to the city). This and other suggestions made by participants in this pilot study were incorporated into the second pilot study.

Pilot Study #2. The second pilot study was conducted to fulfil the same goals as pilot one. First, participants read and evaluated the revised transgression account. Participants were then randomly assigned to rate either the aggravating or extenuating statements on their informational value, potential influence on evaluations of the transgression, and how aggravating or extenuating they were perceived to be.

The results for the evaluation of the transgression account corroborated the findings of pilot one (using the same rating items and scales). After making the suggested changes to the transgression account (i.e., clarifying where the incident occurred, adding the relationship information), participants ($N = 45$) still saw the incident as negative ($M = 2.58$, $SD = .72$), the perpetrator as moderately blameworthy ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.22$), and the relationship as somewhat damaged ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.22$).

Participants then rated the context statements (including those suggested by pilot one participants) according to their informational value, their potential influence on evaluations of the transgression, and how successful they were in terms of making the perpetrator appear more or less blameworthy. We used these results to “match” the

aggravating and extenuating statements on these three dimensions combined. The matched pairs (including the means and standard deviations for each individual context statement) can be found in Appendix A.

Pilot Study #3. The third pilot study was designed to test whether the risk and control narratives differed significantly from one another in terms of their impact on participants' general relationship beliefs and mood. While participants ($N = 28$) who read the risk narrative saw the author as significantly more vulnerable ($F(1,27) = 41.81$, $p < .0001$) and experienced significantly more negative mood ($F(1,27) = 11.58$, $p < .002$) than those who read the control narrative, the two groups did not differ significantly in terms of their beliefs about relationships in general, $p > .05$ (see Table X for means and standard deviations). Post hoc examination of the narratives indicated that unfortunately both the risk and control narratives involved references to a relationship ending (the key event in the risk manipulation). Since this inadvertent inclusion of a risk cue in the control narrative may have influenced those participants' general relationship beliefs in the same direction as those who received the actual risk narrative, it was important that the inappropriate section be removed from the control narrative and that the pilot study be repeated.

Pilot Study #4. The fourth and final pilot study was designed and executed in virtually the same manner as pilot study three with the exception that participants ($N = 39$) were asked to evaluate either the risk narrative or the revised control narrative. Risk participants evaluated their narrative significantly more negatively than did controls, $F(1,37) = 57.83$, $p < .001$ (see Table 1). The risk participants also reported experiencing significantly more negative mood after having read their narrative than did control

participants, $F(1,37) = 11.58, p = .002$ (see Table 1). Contrary to the findings of pilot three but in accordance with our expectations, risk participants also reported significantly more pessimistic attitudes toward relationships in general than did those who read the control narrative, $F(1,37) = 7.64, p = .009$ (see Table 1).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Pilot Studies Three and Four

Pilot #	Item	Risk	Control
3	Author is vulnerable	5.36 (.88)	3.31 (.80)
3	Negative mood	3.08 (1.06)	2.49 (.98)
3	General Relationship Beliefs	4.76 (.89)	4.65 (.55)
4	Negativity of narrative	2.65 (.48)	1.56 (.41)
4	Negative mood	2.96 (1.09)	2.29 (.74)
4	General Relationship Beliefs	4.55 (.78)	3.88 (.72)

Note. Higher numbers indicate more negativity

Conclusions from pilot studies. After conducting four separate pilot studies, the goals outlined previously were indeed fulfilled. Participants viewed the transgression account as negative, the perpetrator as moderately blameworthy, and the relationship as having potentially been damaged. The aggravating and extenuating context statements were matched according to what extent they made the perpetrator appear more or less blameworthy, their informational value, and their potential influence on evaluations of the transgression account. Finally, as expected, the risk and control narratives differed significantly from one another. Those in the risk group viewed their narrative more negatively than did those in the control. Risk participants experienced significantly more negative mood and expressed significantly more pessimistic beliefs about relationships in general after reading their narrative than did control participants. Ultimately, the overall results of these pilot studies indicated that the materials were indeed being interpreted and utilized as we intended them to be, thereby laying the groundwork for the main study.

Participants

One hundred seventy-four undergraduate psychology students from the University of Calgary (17 males and 157 females) were recruited for this study using the Research Participation Bonus Credit Board. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years ($M = 20.65$; $SD = 2.00$). All were currently involved in highly satisfactory dating relationships ($M = 5.96$; $SD = .96$) of 23 months in length ($SD = 21.42$), on average. None had been previously married.

Twenty-four participants were dropped from the sample prior to analyses. Given the disproportionate ratio of males to females recruited, it was impossible to examine gender differences. Therefore, the 17 male participants were dropped from the sample. This decision is supported in part by the work of Howard (1984), who determined that the sex of a victim can influence the amount and type of blame that is assigned to them. Given that the materials for this study were gender matched (i.e., males read about a male victim, females about a female victim) and dealt with transgressions, it is possible that gender differences could occur. However I would be unable to discern them due to the very small number of male participants in the study. The remaining seven participants who were dropped from analyses included two female participants who were removed when it was discovered that they had participated in the pilot studies that led up to this work and four participants who were not in relationships at the time of the study.

The evaluations of the transgression items and the evaluations of the context items (i.e., the primary dependent variables) were examined for the presence of multivariate outliers. One participant was found to have extreme scores on a composite of the transgression evaluation items and also on a composite of the context evaluation items. This participant was removed from consideration in the analyses that follow. In all, 150 female participants constitute the sample retained for analysis in this study.

Procedure

This study was a 2 x 3 between subjects design examining type of narrative (risk vs. control) and additional context information (all aggravating, all extenuating, or none). Before beginning the study, the researchers obtained participants' initial consent, after which participants completed the bonus credit research participation form. They were

initially told the purpose of the study was to examine how people process information about relationships.

Participants first completed a brief mood checklist after which they were randomly assigned to read either the risk or control narrative. After reading the narrative, participants completed a three-item manipulation check and, again, filled out the mood checklist. Following this, participants completed the General Relationships Beliefs questionnaire.

Next, participants read the basic transgression account. Afterwards, one third of the participants received an additional page of extenuating contextual information, another third received an additional page of aggravating contextual information, while the final third received no further information.

After reading the account and the additional context statements, participants completed several different scales evaluating the transgression and the perpetrator, as well as questionnaires concerning their impressions of the additional contextual information that they were given. For example, they were asked to indicate what type of information they would have liked to have received more of, either aggravating or extenuating. They also indicated how likely they would be to ask the offending partner questions framed in an excusing or condemning manner.

Participants completed the recall task by listing as many details as they could remember from the initial narrative (i.e., risk or control) in the five minutes allotted. Finally, participants were asked to complete a demographic information sheet that asked for their age, sex, and relationship status.

The researcher administered a funnel interview and detailed debriefing once participants had completed all of the tasks. After obtaining fully informed consent, participants were free to leave, with our thanks.

Materials

All materials used in this study were gender matched to the individual participant. For example, female participants read a narrative written by Danielle about her relationship with Stephen.

Narratives. Two narratives were constructed for use in this study, each one and one-half pages in length. The risk narrative was adapted from Boon (1992) and was intended to highlight the inherently risky nature of romantic relationships (see Appendix B). This narrative vividly detailed the recent, painful break-up of Danielle's romantic relationship (e.g. "We had a good relationship overall but things just eroded over time, things just changed", "I almost wish now that I'd never fallen in love with Stephen because it hurts twice as bad now that it's over", and "I'm feeling pretty vulnerable right now because I've realized that getting involved with someone is just risky as hell").

The control narrative was designed for the present study as a neutral counterpart against which the risk narrative could be compared (see Appendix B). It is the mundane account of how Danielle and Stephen met and began dating while working on a Parks and Recreation grounds crew. It does not include any references to risk in relationships.

Transgression Account. This half page account was adapted from an account of a relational transgression obtained in prior research at the University of Waterloo (Boon & Holmes, 1999). It describes how Christa's boyfriend, Rob, spent the night in the same apartment as his ex-girlfriend Michelle (see Appendix B). This poses a problem for

Christa because Michelle has always been a sore point in her relationship with Rob.

Taken at face value, the account is ambiguous as to whether or not anything inappropriate occurred between Rob and his ex-girlfriend that night. It does not include any additional contextual information concerning either the relationship between Christa and Rob or the event itself.

Context statements. Two types of additional context statements were used in this study, all of which were written from the victim, Christa's, perspective. Participants in the aggravating context condition received a page containing ten aggravating context statements, that is, statements containing additional information that made the perpetrator, Rob, appear more blameworthy (e.g., "Rob has openly admitted to cheating on Michelle more than one time during their two years. If he did it to her, he could do it to me."). Participants in the extenuating context condition received ten extenuating context statements, in other words, statements containing additional information that made Rob appear less blameworthy (e.g., "Michelle had moved into Rob's old apartment with Rob's friend Jeff. They have been seeing each other since shortly after she and Rob broke up, and living together for a couple of months now."). Participants in the no context condition received no additional information.

Four of the twenty context statements were taken from the original account, while the remainder were constructed by the researchers, some based on suggestions made by pilot participants. Based on the results of a pilot study ($N = 45$), the aggravating and extenuating statements were matched according to their level of intensity (e.g. for each level of aggravating statement there is an equally extenuating statement), informational

value, and ability to influence decision-making (see Appendix A). These statements were presented in order of increasing diagnosticity.

Measures (See Appendix C)

Mood. The first questionnaire participants completed was a mood checklist, adapted from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegan, 1988). It consisted of 18 words that describe feelings and emotions. Both before and after reading the risk/control narrative, participants were instructed to read each item and rate the extent to which they were experiencing that feeling or emotion at that particular point in time. Participants' ratings were based on a 7-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). For analysis, the individual items were combined to form a general mood index with higher numbers indicating more negative mood ($\alpha = .95$).

Manipulation checks. The first manipulation check involved participants' assessments of the tone and content of the risk/control narratives, as well as their overall impressions of the narratives (i.e., "The tone of the narrative I just read was..."). Participants used a 3-point Likert scale to respond to each of the three items. The endpoints ranged from 1 (positive) to 3 (negative). For analysis, these three items were combined to form an index with higher numbers indicating a more negative interpretation of the narrative ($\alpha = .90$).

The second manipulation check used was the Relationships Belief Scale (Boon & Holmes, 1999). This 15 item scale was originally constructed to assess people's relational schemas or their beliefs about what relationships are generally or typically like (e.g. "Part of being in a relationship is facing the risk of someday losing the relationship");

“People often get more dependent on relationships than they ever come to realize until it is too late”; “The benefits of being in a relationship outweigh the costs”). In other words, it allowed researchers to examine participants’ general relational schemas. As in previous research (i.e., Boon & Holmes, 1999), it was used in this study primarily to establish the extent to which a single case study could affect participants’ perceptions of vulnerability in relationships. This scale constituted a manipulation check in that participants who read the risk narrative ought to provide systematically different evaluations of the items than those participants who read the control narrative. Ratings were made on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For analysis, these items were combined to form a general relationships beliefs index with higher numbers indicating greater negativity or a more cautious approach towards relationships in general. ($\alpha = .72$).

Evaluations of and Inferences about the Transgression. All of the following items were adapted for use in this study from Boon and Holmes (1999). Participants initially evaluated the transgression account on four dimensions: negativity of the account, negativity of the behaviour, level of upset, and impact (e.g. “In terms of its impact on the writer’s relationship with his or her partner, the incident described was” 1 “not at all significant” to 7 “extremely significant”). These four items were combined to form a single index of severity, with higher numbers indicating that the transgression was perceived as increasingly negative ($\alpha = .70$). See Appendix C.

Participants were also asked to make a number of inferences based on their impressions of the transgression account. Participants rated 16 items such as how responsible the partner was for hurting the author, how much the partner intended to hurt

the author, how blameworthy the partner was, and how likely the author would be to forgive the partner. The three items dealing with the level of responsibility, blameworthiness, and intent of the perpetrator were combined to form an index of perceived blameworthiness in which higher numbers indicated greater perceived blame, responsibility, and intent ($\alpha = .84$). How likely Christa would be to forgive the perpetrator was rated on a 7-point Likert scale and then reversed coded, with higher numbers indicating less likelihood of Christa forgiving.

Putting themselves in the author's shoes, participants also rated how likely they would be to forgive the partner in this situation, as well as how much damage they believe this incident would do to the relationship. All of these judgements were made using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). These two items were combined into an index, wherein higher numbers indicated more damage to the relationship and less possibility of forgiveness ($\alpha = .81$).

Adapted from the work of Planap, Rutherford, and Honeycutt (1988), participants were then asked (again putting themselves in the author's position) how much the incident that occurred would negatively affect certain aspects of the relationship with the partner. The aspects participants were asked to consider were: closeness, emotional involvement, confiding, supportiveness, fairness, companionship, honesty, security, freedom, and trust. Again a 7-point Likert scale formed the basis for the ratings, with endpoints ranging from 1 (no short-term negative effect) to 7 (extreme short-term negative effect). For analysis, the individual items were combined to form a general index of negative effect on the relationship with higher numbers indicating more negative effect ($\alpha = .85$).

In another inference task, participants were asked to make five more specific judgements regarding the nature of the partner's behaviour, for example, "This incident is best interpreted as an occasion when Rob failed to consider Christa's best interests" and "This experience is best taken at its face value". These items were rated using a 7-point Likert scale anchored with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 7 indicating "strongly agree". For analysis, the individual items were combined to form a general index of incident-specific evaluations of the perpetrator's behaviour, with higher numbers indicating more negative evaluations of the perpetrator's behaviour ($\alpha = .59$).

In order to evaluate the more global implications of the transgression, five items were designed to assess the potential influence of the risk manipulation at the broad level of inferences concerning "the relationship in general". Participants used a 7 point Likert scale (1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree"), to respond to items such as "Rob's behaviour in this instance leads me to doubt his sincerity in the relationship more generally" and "Rob is the type of person who is generally responsive to Christa's needs". For analysis, the individual items were combined to form a general index of global implications of Rob's behaviour with higher numbers indicating more negative global implications ($\alpha = .77$).

Evaluations of the Context Statements. Participants were asked to make judgements concerning the informational or diagnostic value of the additional context items they were given. Rather than being asked to evaluate the "additional context", participants who did not receive any additional context were asked to evaluate the "information" contained in the transgression account. For participants in the no context condition, these questionnaires served solely as filler material. All of the context

judgements were rated on scales with endpoints 1 “not at all or none” to 7 “extremely, entirely, or great deal more”.

The first set of eight context evaluation items focused on such issues as how informative and relevant the context information was, how clearly it spoke to the motives of the partner, and how seriously the author should consider this information when deciding whether or not to forgive. These items were combined into an index of how useful they perceived the additional context information to be, with higher numbers indicating they perceived the context as more informative, relevant, clear, and worthy of serious consideration ($\alpha = .75$).

Participants who received extenuating context were also asked to indicate how “good” the context was, how much the context truly excused Rob’s behaviour, how much the context truly justified Rob’s behaviour, to what extent they would need more information before forgiving, and how helpful the information was in understanding Rob’s motives. Participants who received aggravating context were asked to indicate how “good” the context was, how much the context failed to truly excuse Rob’s behaviour, how much the context failed to justify Rob’s behaviour, to what extent they would need more information before condemning Rob, and how helpful the information was in understanding Rob’s motives. For those in the aggravating condition, these items were reversed coded prior to analysis, in order to be comparable with the questions posed to the extenuating context group.

The second set of context evaluation items was designed to evaluate how much caution participants would exercise in relying on the additional context statements they were given when deciding whether to excuse or condemn Rob for his actions. The

caution judgements included ten items such as “the contextual information that Christa provided is insufficient to warrant excusing Rob for his behaviour in this instance” and “I would rather be cautious and ignore the contextual information when drawing conclusions about Rob’s behaviour even if it means I might be wrong”. Participants used a 7-point Likert scale for their responses, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Again, those participants who received no additional context were asked the same questions. However, the references were to the “information” as opposed to the “contextual information”. Participants in the no context condition were given these items solely as filler. For analysis of the extenuating and aggravating condition responses, the ten individual items were combined to form a general index of desire for caution, with higher numbers indicating greater desire for caution ($\alpha = .72$). See Appendix C.

Exploratory Measures. In order to investigate participants’ propensity to engage in hypothesis testing and whether the experimental manipulation affected such propensities, all participants were asked “If it were the only kind of evidence you could obtain, which type of evidence would you prefer?”. The response alternatives were “positive evidence that Rob’s motives were unselfish or benevolent” or “negative evidence that Rob’s motives were selfish or inconsiderate”. Participants were also asked how strong their preference was for the type of information they selected, scaled from 1 “a slight preference” to 7 “an extremely strong preference”. Participants then indicated, again on a 7-point Likert scale (1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”), whether they would require a lot of positive evidence before concluding that Rob truly cared about Christa. Finally, participants were asked whether they would require a lot of negative evidence before they could conclude that Rob did not truly care about Christa.

Another eight items were included to discern whether or not participants were motivated to ask the offending partner “loaded” questions. Four of these loaded questions were positively phrased, “excusing” questions (e.g., “When you acted in this instance were you only trying your hardest to think of what’s best for the future of your relationship?”). The remaining four items were negatively-phrased, “condemning” questions (e.g., “Could you have any good reason for acting the way you did in this situation?”). Each of these items was rated on a 7-point Likert scale (with endpoints of 1 “not at all likely” to 7 “very likely”). For analysis, the individual positively framed questions were combined to form a general index of tendency towards asking excusing questions ($\alpha = .44$), whereas the individual negatively framed questions were combined to form a general index of tendency towards asking condemning questions ($\alpha = .72$). In both cases, higher numbers indicated a greater likelihood that, given the opportunity, the participant would ask Rob these questions. Both the hypothesis testing items and the loaded questions were adapted from Boon (1992).

For the recall task, participants were instructed to “think back to the narrative you read at the very beginning of the study, about Danielle and Stephen. In the space below, please recall everything you can about the narrative you read. We are especially interested in the first details that come to mind”. Participants were told that they would have five minutes in which to complete this task in the space provided below the instructions and on the back of the sheet, if necessary.

Demographic Information. Participants provided information about their age, gender, racial background, current relationship status, length of current relationship, and partner’s gender. Three items “how satisfied are you with your relationship?”, “how successful is

your relationship?”, and “how happy are you with your partner?” were combined to create an index of relationship satisfaction ($\alpha = .89$) with higher numbers indicating greater satisfaction.

Coding Recall Data

In order to code the recall data, the risk and controls narratives were broken down into smaller units of information, each including one detail or idea (see Appendix D for coding sheets). For example, the sentence “In the long run I've ended up hurt anyways and I wish he would have been more open with me when he first started having doubts about our compatibility” was broken into two separate sections, ““In the long run I've ended up hurt anyways” and “I wish he would have been more open with me when he first started having doubts about our compatibility”. Two independent coders (the author and an undergraduate research assistant) first examined the data for accurate recall of the details (e.g., the relationship had been ongoing for 14 months) and then for more general, gist-type recall of ideas presented in the narrative (e.g., even good relationships can end unexpectedly). Finally, coders noted any situations in which the participants “recalled” details that were not present in the actual narratives or instances where the participant chose to analyze the relationship in the narrative.

Analyses

Prior to analysis, I examined my data to test the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance associated with analysis of variance (ANOVA). According to the central limit theorem, normality can be expected with a large sample size, given that examinations of normality in grouped data focuses on the sampling distribution of the means and not the distribution of the individual scores (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1992).

Examination of the residuals indicated that they were normally distributed which, according to Tabachnick and Fidell, means that the scores on the individual items are also normally distributed.

I also examined the assumption of homogeneity of variance by hand calculating F_{\max} , that is the ratio of the largest cell variance to the smallest, for each of the variables and indices I created (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1992). None of the variables or indices achieved an F_{\max} value greater than 2 at an alpha level of .05, which indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated.

I used ANOVA to test my hypotheses. Participants' general relationship belief scores were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), comparing just the risk and control groups, since participants completed this scale before receiving the additional contextual information. The analysis of the mood measures involved a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) with pre and post mood as the within-subject factor and risk/control as the between-subjects factor. The context evaluation items were examined using a 2 Narrative (risk versus control) X 2 Context (aggravating versus extenuating) ANOVA. As mentioned previously, the no context condition did not receive any additional information, therefore these items were included strictly as filler material for that group and they are not included in this set of analyses.

The method of analysis used for the remainder of the measures was a 2 Narrative (risk versus control) X 3 Context (aggravating, extenuating, no context) between-subjects analysis of variance. In order to control for differences in cell sizes (risk/aggravating $n = 31$; risk/extenuating $n = 27$; risk/no context $n = 18$; control/aggravating $n = 30$; control/extenuating $n = 28$; control/no context $n = 16$), the "unique" method of analysis

of variance was used. The “unique” approach allowed me to assess all effects simultaneously, so that each effect was adjusted for all other effects in the model, thereby reducing the effect of any intercorrelations (Norusis, 1990; Howell, 1992). Significant main effects of context were followed up using planned comparisons (i.e., two-tailed t-tests) to examine the differences between, first, the aggravating and no context conditions, and second, the extenuating and no context conditions. In the case of a statistically significant interaction, I examined the simple main effects of context separately within the risk and control conditions.

Results

I will begin this discussion of the results by covering the detection of multivariate outliers, mood, and the manipulation checks. After a brief review of the hypotheses for this study, I will detail the results for the evaluations of the transgression followed by those for the evaluation of the context statements. This section will end with a report of the findings for the exploratory measures and the recall task.

Multivariate Outliers

Using Mahalanobis distance with $p < .001$ to isolate participants whose scores may be outliers on more than one item, one participant was found to have extreme scores on both a composite of the transgression items ($\chi^2(8) = 27.40$) and a composite of the context items ($\chi^2(10) = 29.36$). This participant was removed from the analyses.

Mood

A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) with context and risk as between-subjects factors and time (i.e., pre-narrative versus post-narrative) as a within-subject factor, approach revealed a significant interaction between narrative condition and time of mood measurement, $F(1, 147) = 85.49, p < .001$. This cross-over interaction indicated that risk participants became significantly more negative in their mood from the pre-narrative mood check ($M = 2.40, SD = .84$) to the post-narrative mood check ($M = 3.08, SD = 1.04$), $F(1, 74) = 62.94, p < .001$, whereas control participants did exactly the opposite, $F(1, 73) = 23.40, p < .001$ (pre-narrative $M = 2.46, SD = .81$; post-narrative $M = 2.24, SD = .77$). These findings indicate that, as expected, reading the risk narrative shifted participants in a more negative direction emotionally. Unexpectedly, the control narrative, although designed to be neutral in both mood and content, appears to have shifted those who read it in a more positive direction emotionally.

Manipulation Checks

Evaluations of tone and content. As expected, risk participants ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .45$) rated the risk narrative significantly more negative in tone and content than control participants ($M = 1.60$, $SD = .46$) rated the control narrative ($F(1, 148) = 208.19$, $p < .001$). This is a good indication that, as expected, the two experimental narratives were perceived differently by the participants who read them, with the risk participants being more negative than the controls.

General relationship beliefs. This manipulation check examined the extent to which reading a single narrative about a painful break-up could temporarily influence participants' beliefs about relationships in general. As I had anticipated, participants who read the risk narrative ($M = 4.55$, $SD = .73$) reported significantly more negative beliefs about relationships than did those participants who read the control narrative ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .69$), $F(1, 148) = 4.59$, $p = .034$. Thus, reading the risk narrative temporarily shifted participants' beliefs about relationships in general in a more negative, cautious direction.

Evaluations of the Transgression

Review of Hypotheses for Transgression Evaluation Items. The following items were designed to examine the extent to which exposure to risk and additional context influenced the way in which participants evaluated a relational transgression. I predicted that those who received the aggravating context would be most negative while those in the extenuating context condition would see the transgression and perpetrator as the least negative, with results for the no context condition falling in the middle. In addition, I

expected that risk participants would evaluate the transgression and its perpetrator more negatively than control participants.

Given this, I also predicted that an interaction between risk and context would qualify these main effects. More specifically, I predicted that perceived risk would diminish participants' tendencies to make more charitable attributions in the extenuating as opposed to the no context condition, while increasing participants' tendencies to draw more cautious and unforgiving attributions in the aggravating context condition. In other words, I expected that exposure to risk would diminish the influence extenuating context would have on participants' evaluations, but increase the influence of any aggravating context they were presented with. Control participants, on the other hand, would show significantly smaller differences in the amount of influence that context had over their evaluations of transgressions. The most common effect found in this study was that of context alone, therefore, for the sake of clarity, all means and standard deviations for significant main effects of context can be found in Table 2.

Impressions of the transgression. The risk and control groups did not differ in their impressions of how negative the transgression was, $F(1, 145) = 1.47, ns$. However, as predicted, the context conditions did, $F(2, 144) = 54.25, p < .001$. As can be seen in Table 2, participants in the aggravating context condition were marginally more negative in their evaluations of the transgression than were those in the no context condition, $t(147) = 1.85, p = .07$. Participants in the no context condition evaluated the transgression significantly more negatively than participants in the extenuating context condition, $t(147) = -6.68, p < .001$.

Table 2

Evaluations of the Transgression: Means and Standard Deviations for Context Groups

		Aggravating	No Context	Extenuating
Impressions of the event	<u>M</u>	6.18 ^a	5.95 ^a	5.09 ^b
	<u>SD</u>	(.55)	(.67)	(.58)
How blameworthy was Rob	<u>M</u>	4.85 ^a	4.17 ^b	2.91 ^c
	<u>SD</u>	(.92)	(.98)	(.88)
Forgiveness: Christa	<u>M</u>	3.61 ^a	4.03 ^a	2.85 ^b
	<u>SD</u>	(1.31)	(1.19)	(.77)
Forgiveness: participant	<u>M</u>	4.88 ^a	4.19 ^b	2.96 ^c
	<u>SD</u>	(1.13)	(1.25)	(1.11)
Short-term negative effects	<u>M</u>	5.40 ^a	5.07 ^a	4.25 ^b
	<u>SD</u>	(.77)	(.97)	(.96)
Negativity of Rob's behaviour	<u>M</u>	5.16 ^a	4.61 ^b	3.60 ^c
	<u>SD</u>	(.59)	(.65)	(.88)
Negative implications of Rob's behaviour: incident specific	<u>M</u>	4.94 ^a	4.60 ^b	3.63 ^c
	<u>SD</u>	(.68)	(.68)	(.94)
Negative implications of Rob's behaviour: global	<u>M</u>	5.38 ^a	4.62 ^b	3.56 ^c
	<u>SD</u>	(.68)	(.81)	(1.02)

Note: Standard deviations are in brackets below means. Means having different subscripts differ significantly. P-values can be found in the text.

A significant interaction however, qualified the context main effect, $F(2, 144) = 3.69$, $p = .03$. Simple main effects tests indicated that there were significant main effects of context within both the risk, $F(2, 73) = 37.79$, $p < .001$, and control groups $F(2, 71) = 21.76$, $p < .001$, however the form of the main effects differs as a function of experimental condition (see Table 3).

Table 3

Negativity of the transgression: Means for risk and control group cells

	Aggravating	No Context	Extenuating
Risk	6.07 ^a (.70)	6.00 ^a (.62)	4.32 ^b (.76)
Control	6.17 ^a (.65)	5.66 ^b (.72)	4.80 ^c (.80)

Note: Standard deviations are in brackets below means. Means having different subscripts differ significantly. P-values can be found in the text.

For example, within the risk condition, those participants who received the aggravating context did not differ significantly from the no context condition in their evaluations of the transgression, $t(73) = -.23$, ns. On the other hand, participants in the no context condition (and hence participants in the aggravating condition) saw the incident and Rob in a significantly more negative light than did participants in the extenuating context group, $t(73) = -6.99$, $p < .001$.

In contrast, within the control condition, the aggravating context participants evaluated the transgression significantly more negatively than did the no context group, $t(73) = 2.84, p = .01$. In turn, the no context group rated the transgression significantly more negatively than did the extenuating context group, $t(73) = -2.72, p = .01$. This indicates that within the risk group, the exposure to the risk manipulation had the same effect on participants' impressions of the transgressions as did receiving aggravating context. In the control condition, however, aggravating context gave participants a significantly more negative impression of the transgression than did just the transgression account alone, while the extenuating context gave a significantly less negative impression of the transgression.

How blameworthy was Rob? This index was meant to examine the amount of responsibility and blame Rob should be made to bear for what he did. It also includes participants' inferences about how intentional Rob's actions were in this situation. The expected main effect of context was significant for evaluations of the perpetrator's blameworthiness, $F(2, 144) = 64.21, p < .001$. As expected, as can be seen in Table 2, the aggravating context group assigned significantly more responsibility and blame to the perpetrator (and inferred more intent on Rob's part) than did the no context group, $t(147) = 3.48, p = .001$. In turn, the no context group felt Rob should be made to shoulder significantly more blame than did the extenuating context group, $t(73) = -6.26, p < .001$.

Although Boon and Holmes (1999) found that participants who were exposed to this risk narrative were more likely to blame Rob for what happened than were control participants, in this study there was no significant main effect of risk, $F(1, 145) = .29, ns$.

In addition, and contrary to my expectations, the interaction between risk and context was also non-significant, $F(2, 144) = .09$, *ns*.

How likely would Christa be to forgive? As expected, the main effect of risk was significant, $F(1, 144) = 10.32$, $p = .002$. Bearing in mind that larger numbers indicated less likelihood of Christa forgiving, risk participants ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.44$) thought Christa was significantly less likely to forgive Rob for the transgression than did control participants ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.27$).

The main effect of context was also significant, $F(2, 144) = 43.36$, $p < .001$. Participants in the aggravating context condition were only marginally more likely to say Christa would not forgive than participants in the no context condition, $t(147) = -1.78$, $p = .08$. On the other hand, as I predicted, the no context condition was significantly more likely to say that Christa would not forgive than was the extenuating context condition, $t(147) = -8.08$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). Contrary to expectations, the interaction between risk and context was not significant, $F(2, 144) = 1.71$, *ns*.

Putting yourself in Christa's position: Estimates of damage and forgiveness. This index examines participants' estimates of the damage that the relationship would incur and the likelihood of forgiveness if the participant herself was the victim in this transgression. Although the risk and control groups did not differ in their estimations of damage to the relationship and likelihood they would forgive Rob, $F(1, 145) = 1.76$, *ns*, the predicted main effect of context was significant, $F(2, 144) = 40.94$, $p < .001$.

As expected, the aggravating context group believed they themselves would be significantly less charitable towards Rob than did participants in the no context condition, $t(147) = 2.78$, $p = .006$ (see Table 2). The no context group was also significantly less

likely to be charitable towards Rob than those in the extenuating context condition, $t(147) = -4.89, p < .001$. There was no significant interaction between risk and context to qualify the main effect of context, $F(2, 144) = 2.25, ns$.

Putting yourself in Christa's position: Short-term negative effects on the relationship. Given the effect of context on participants evaluations of the transgression thus far, it comes as no surprise that the main effect of context for this item was significant as well, $F(2, 144) = 24.04, p < .001$. As expected, participants in the aggravating context condition saw marginally greater short-term negative effects on the relationship than did the no context condition, $t(147) = 1.72, p = .09$ (see Table 2). In turn, participants in the no context condition saw significantly more negative effects on the relationship than participants in the extenuating context group, $t(147) = -4.20, p < .001$. Again, in contrast to the findings of Boon and Holmes, risk and control groups did not differ in their estimations of short-term negative effects $F(1, 145) = .06, ns$. The anticipated interaction between risk and context also failed to reach significance, $F(2, 144) = .40, ns$.

Negativity of Rob's behaviour? As I predicted, participants in the three context conditions differed significantly from one another in their evaluations of Rob's behaviour, $F(2, 144) = 69.15, p < .001$. The aggravating context group evaluated Rob's behaviour significantly more negatively than did participants in the no context condition, $t(147) = 3.56, p = .001$ (see Table 2). In turn, participants in the no context condition saw Rob's behaviour in a significantly more negative light than did the extenuating group, $t(147) = -6.43, p < .001$. Contrary to predictions however, the main effect of risk,

$F(1, 145) = .10$, *ns*, and the interaction, $F(2, 144) = 2.02$, *ns*, failed to achieve significance.

When this index is broken down into its two component parts (i.e., incident specific and global implications of the behaviour), the results are essentially the same. At the incident specific level of analysis, there is a statistically significant main effect of context, $F(2, 144) = 41.38$, $p < .001$. Participants in the aggravating condition was significantly more negative about Rob's incident specific behaviour than the no context group, $t(147) = 2.02$, $p = .05$. The no context group rated Rob's behaviour significantly more negatively in this instance than did the extenuating context group, $t(147) = -5.61$, $p < .001$. Again, the predicted main effect of risk, $F(1, 145) = .61$, $p = .44$, and the interaction, $F(2, 144) = .81$, $p = .45$, were not found to be significant.

At the global level of analysis, as anticipated, the context conditions differed significantly from one another, $F(2, 144) = 68.70$, $p < .001$. Participants in the aggravating condition interpreted Rob's behaviour as significantly more negative globally than the no context group, $t(147) = 4.20$, $p < .001$. In turn, participants in the no context condition was significantly more negative in this regard than those in the extenuating context condition, $t(147) = -5.76$, $p < .001$.

While the anticipated difference between the risk and control groups proved non-significant, $F(1, 145) = 1.60$, $p = .21$, the interaction between risk and context was marginally significant, $F(2, 144) = 2.70$, $p = .07$. Simple main effects tests indicated that there were significant main effects of context within both the risk, $F(2, 73) = 22.74$, $p < .001$, and control, $F(2, 71) = 50.47$, $p < .001$, groups. The pattern of these effects differed however, as a function of experimental condition (see Table 4).

For example, within the risk group, the aggravating context condition differed only marginally from the no context condition in their evaluations of the global implications of Rob's behaviour, $t(73) = .31, p = .09$. On the other hand, a second planned t-test indicated that the no context condition was significantly more negative in their evaluations of global implications than was the extenuating context group, $t(73) = -4.09, p < .001$. Within the control condition, the aggravating context group evaluated the global implications of Rob's behaviour significantly more negatively than did the no context group, $t(71) = 4.45, p < .001$, who, in turn, were more negative in this regard than the extenuating context group, $t(73) = -4.03, p < .001$. This indicates that within the risk group, the exposure to the risk manipulation had the same effect on participants' evaluations of the global implications of Rob's behaviour as did receiving aggravating context. In the control condition, however, aggravating context participants were significantly more negative in their evaluations of the global implications of Rob's behaviour than did just the transgression account alone, while the extenuating context saw the global implications significantly less negatively.

Table 4

Global evaluations of perpetrator's behaviour: Means for risk and control group cells

	Aggravating	No Context	Extenuating
Risk	5.26 ^a (.72)	4.82 ^a (.85)	3.75 ^b (1.02)
Control	5.51 ^a (.64)	4.40 ^b (.72)	3.38 ^c (1.00)

Note: Standard deviations are in brackets below means. Means having different subscripts differ significantly. P-values can be found in the text.

Evaluations of the Context

Review of Hypotheses for Evaluations of the Context. These analyses examined differences in the perceived utility of the additional aggravating and extenuating context statements given to participants. Because these items served as filler for the no context condition, the participants in that group were excluded from these analyses.

I expected that participants in the aggravating context condition would have more stringent criteria for accepting or rejecting additional context information than would participants in the extenuating condition. I also predicted that participants who received aggravating context would find their additional information more useful in making judgements of the transgression than would participants in the extenuating context condition. I also predicted that participants in the risk condition would have the more stringent criteria for the acceptance or rejection of additional contextual information than would those in the control group.

I also expected an interaction between experimental group and context condition to qualify these main effects. Essentially, I expected that risk participants would hold the most stringent criteria for the use of extenuating rather than aggravating context. That is, I anticipated that risk participants would be more likely to question extenuating context, but accept aggravating context at “face value”. Because of the number of significant main effects of context, clarity again dictates that the means and standard deviations for the context evaluation items be included in tabular form (see Table 5).

How stringent are participants' criteria for accepting context? Although the predicted main effect of context was marginally significant, $F(1, 112) = 2.97, p = .09$, the direction of the scores was in opposition to what I had originally predicted. Based on the work of Reeder and Brewer, I predicted that aggravating context would be seen as more reliable as a base for making judgements than the extenuating context. However, the results of this analysis indicated that instead, participants saw the extenuating context as somewhat more informative, relevant, clear, and deserving of serious consideration than the aggravating context in deciding whether or not Rob deserves to be forgiven (see Table 5).

The main effect of risk was marginally significant, $F(1, 112) = 2.11, p = .09$. In general, control participants ($M = 5.02, SD = 1.04$) tended to see the additional contextual information as more informative, relevant, clear, and of worthy of serious consideration in deciding whether or not Rob deserves to be forgiven, than did risk participants ($M = 4.79, SD = 1.08$). The expected interaction between risk and context failed to achieve statistical significance, $F(2, 112) = .001, ns$.

More evaluations of criteria for using context information. The following items were reverse coded before analysis, since the original materials for the aggravating context condition dealt with condemning Rob's behaviour, failing to justify it, and examining how much more information the participant would need before condemning Rob. The decision to reverse code these items was made based on the assumption that condemning and excusing are inverses of each other. Means and standard deviations for each of the following significant context main effects can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Evaluating the context statements: Means and standard deviations

	Aggravating	Extenuating
How stringent is the criteria (e.g., informative, relevant, clear)	4.98 ^a (.80)	5.30 ^a (1.16)
How “good” is this context	3.38 ^a (1.25)	5.36 ^b (1.28)
Excusing the behaviour	2.66 ^a (1.25)	4.98 ^b (1.33)
Justifying the behaviour	3.82 ^a (1.68)	4.73 ^b (1.30)
Amount of information needed to justify forgiving	3.15 ^a (1.63)	4.09 ^b (1.83)
Caution in using additional information	4.34 ^a (.56)	3.23 ^b (.94)

Note: Standard deviations are in brackets below means. Means having different superscripts differ significantly. P-values can be found in the text.

How “good” is the context in terms of excusing Rob’s behaviour? As predicted, the main effect of context was significant, $F(1, 112) = 70.23, p < .001$. Not surprisingly, the extenuating context was found to be significantly better at excusing Rob’s behaviour than was aggravating context. However, neither the predicted main effect of risk, $F(1,$

113) = .03, ns, nor the interaction, $F(2, 112) = .54$, ns, were found to be statistically significant.

To what extent does the context excuse Rob's behaviour? Again, the hypothesized main effect of context was found to be significant, $F(1, 112) = 95.27$, $p < .001$. As with the previous item, the extenuating context was rated as excusing Rob's behaviour to a significantly greater extent than was aggravating context. The expected main effect of risk, $F(1, 113) = 1.64$, ns, and the interaction, $F(2, 112) = .68$, ns, however, failed to reach significance.

To what extent does the context provided justify Rob's behaviour? The context groups differed significantly from one another in their estimations of how well the context justified Rob's actions, $F(1, 112) = 10.32$, $p = .002$. Extenuating context was thought to be better able to justify Rob's behaviour in this situation than was the aggravating context information. Both the predicted main effect of risk, $F(1, 113) = .14$, ns, and the anticipated interaction, $F(2, 112) = .06$, ns, failed to reach statistical significance.

How much more information would you need before being able to justify forgiving Rob? There was a significant main effect of context although it did not manifest itself as I had expected, $F(1, 112) = 8.60$, $p = .004$. Strangely, those who received extenuating context believed they would need significantly more information before they could justify forgiving Rob than did those in the aggravating context condition. Neither the main effect of risk, $F(1, 113) = .13$, ns, nor the interaction between risk and context, $F(2, 112) = 1.93$, ns, were significant.

How cautious would you be in using the additional information provided? Both the predicted main effect of context, $F(1, 112) = 62.18, p < .001$ and the expected main effect of risk, $F(1, 112) = 5.93, p = .02$, were significant for this index. As opposed to what I had anticipated, participants in the aggravating condition indicated that they would be significantly more cautious in using the additional contextual information they had been given than did those who received extenuating context. On the other hand, in line with my original predictions, risk participants ($M = 4.06, SD = .88$) were significantly more likely to indicate a desire to exercise caution when using additional contextual information than were control participants ($M = 3.80, SD = .89$). The hypothesized interaction between risk and context failed to achieve significance, $F(2, 112) = .84, ns$.

Exploratory Measures

The analysis of these measures includes all three context conditions. The no context were returned to the analyses in order to examine what types of information participants who had read only the transgression account would like to receive. The means and standard deviations for the context main effects can be found in Table 6.

What type of evidence would you prefer to receive? Overall, an overwhelming majority of participants (77.3%) indicated they would prefer to receive positive evidence (indicating the perpetrator's motives were unselfish or benevolent) rather than negative evidence (indicating the perpetrator's motives were selfish or inconsiderate), given the choice. This was true for both the risk (76.3%) and control (78.4%) conditions and regardless of type of context participants received (aggravating = 70.5%; extenuating = 83.6%; no context = 79.4%).

Table 6

Exploratory Measures: Means and standard deviations

	Aggravating	No Context	Extenuating
Need a lot of positive evidence	5.51 ^a (1.23)	5.00 ^a (1.50)	4.06 ^b (.88)
Propensity for asking negatively loaded questions	5.14 ^a (1.26)	4.51 ^b (1.44)	4.37 ^b (1.21)

Note: Standard deviations are in brackets below means. Means having different superscripts differ significantly. P-values can be found in the text.

Positive and Negative information. The only significant effect found for the questions of how likely is it you would need a lot of positive information before concluding Rob truly care about Christa was a main effect of context, $F(2, 144) = 21.55$, $p < .001$. There was no significant main effect of risk, $F(1, 145) = .14$, ns, nor an interaction, $F(2, 144) = .62$, ns. Planned t-tests indicated that participants in the aggravating context condition was marginally more likely than the no context group to indicate a need for a lot of positive evidence before concluding that Rob truly cares about Christa, $t(147) = 1.73$, $p = .09$. On the other hand, the no context group indicated they would need significantly more positive evidence before drawing this conclusion ($t(147) = -2.37$, $p = .02$) than did participants in the extenuating context condition.

There was no significant main effect of risk, $F(1, 145) = .08$, ns, nor of context, $F(2, 144) = 1.61$, ns, for needing a lot of negative evidence before deciding Rob truly does not care about Christa. The interaction also failed to reach statistical significance, $F(2,$

144) = 1.56, ns. Overall, participants agreed only moderately ($M = 4.50$; $SD = 1.59$) with the statement “As a general rule, I would need a lot of negative evidence to conclude that Rob does not truly care about Christa”.

Loaded questions. A significant main effect of context, $F(2, 144) = 5.74$, $p = .004$, was found for the question of how likely the participant was to ask negatively loaded questions (i.e., accusatory questions). Participants in the aggravating context condition (see Table 6) was significantly more likely to want to ask negatively loaded questions than was the no context condition, $t(147) = 2.31$, $p = .02$. On the other hand, the no context condition did not differ significantly from the extenuating context condition, $t(73) = -.50$, ns. Neither a significant main effect of risk $F(1, 145) = .39$, ns, nor an interaction context, $F(2, 144) = .01$, ns, were found.

While there was no significant main effect of either risk, $F(1, 145) = .25$, ns, or context, $F(2, 144) = .86$, ns, for positively loaded questions (i.e., excusing questions), there was a marginally significant interaction between risk and context, $F(2, 144) = 2.92$, $p = .06$. Simple main effects tests indicated that there was a marginally significant main effect of context within the control group, $F(2, 71) = 2.39$, $p = .10$, but none within the risk group, $F(2, 73) = 1.11$, ns (see Table 7). Within the control condition, the aggravating context group were no more likely to ask positively loaded questions than were the no context group, $t(71) = .71$, ns. The second planned t-test indicated that the no context group was significantly less likely to ask positively loaded questions than was the extenuating context group, $t(73) = 2.04$, $p = .045$.

Table 7

Positively loaded questions: Means for risk and control group cells

	Aggravating	No Context	Extenuating
Risk	4.23 (1.07)	4.63 (.94)	4.24 (.90)
Control	4.38 (1.30)	4.11 (1.43)	4.88 (.95)

Note: Standard deviations are in brackets below means. Means having different superscripts differ significantly. P-values can be found in the text.

Recall

A cursory examination of the percentage of information participants were able to recall indicates that while there was a great deal of information contained in both the risk and control narratives (67 and 69 potential items respectively), participants remembered very little of it. Overall, participants recalled only 10.79% of the information contained in the first narrative they read.

It is interesting to note however, that statistical analysis uncovered a significant main effect of risk for the recall of information, $F(1, 145) = 35.32, p < .001$. In this case, participants were able to recall a greater percentage of available information from the control narrative ($M = 19.94, SD = 9.71$) than they recalled from the risk narrative ($M = 11.94, SD = 5.01$). There was no significant main effect of context, $F(2, 144) = .19, ns$, nor did risk and context form a statistically significant interaction, $F(2, 144) = .37, ns$.

Discussion

This study was designed to examine one of the processes by which indirect perceptions of risk may shift participants into a more cautious mode of thinking, namely by influencing their use of available context. In particular, I sought to examine how perceptions of risk would influence people's use of aggravating and extenuating context information, and their evaluations of its diagnostic value as a tool for evaluating transgressions. Unfortunately, only the main effect of context proved to be strong, producing reliable effects in this study. Unlike Boon and Holmes (1999), I found very limited support for the influence of perceived risk. Interactions between risk and context were also very rare. As a result, my ability to meet my objective, as stated above, was severely restricted.

In the sections that follow, I will review my results, discussing potential theoretical and practical explanations for those findings that did not conform to my expectations. I will start by discussing the results for evaluations of the transgression and the context, move on to discuss the results for the hypothesis testing items, and end with results for the recall data. Implications of this work will follow and the discussion will conclude with limitations of this study, including suggestions for alterations to the design, and future research possibilities.

Evaluations of the transgression

The results clearly indicate that when asked to evaluate a transgression that took place in someone else's relationship, participants took the additional context they were given very seriously. On every item designed to assess their perceptions of the transgression and the perpetrator, my predictions held true. Those who received

aggravating context were significantly more negative, harsh, and unforgiving in their evaluations of the transgression and of Rob's behaviour than were those who received the extenuating context. Participants who did not receive any additional contextual information fell between these two groups.

The effect of risk on the same perceptions is, unfortunately, far less clear. Initially, the risk manipulation appeared to be working. In choosing and designing the manipulation checks used in this study, I expected that if risk was effectively influencing participants thoughts and feelings, participants would report more negative mood and more pessimistic general relationship beliefs after having read the risk narrative than would those who read the control narrative. These expectations were based on the findings of Boon and Holmes (1999) who used the same scales in determining the effects of risk. In addition, I anticipated that participants in the risk condition would view the risk narrative as significantly more negative in tone and content than control participants would view their narrative.

In these hypotheses I was correct. Those who received the risk narrative reported significantly more negative mood after having read the narrative than they did in the pre-manipulation mood measure. In contrast, control participants reported significantly more positive mood after having read their narrative than they did upon entering the laboratory. In addition, after having read the initial narratives, risk participants reported significantly more pessimistic beliefs about relationships in general than did control participants. Finally, the index designed to determine how participants' viewed the narrative directly indicated that risk participants saw the narrative they read as significantly more negative overall (i.e., in tone and content) than did those who read the control narrative. These

findings clearly indicate that, at least initially, the risk narrative influenced participants' thoughts and feelings.

Unfortunately, results for items later in the questionnaire were very different. Only one of the evaluation of transgression items, the likelihood that Christa would choose not to forgive Rob, resulted in a main effect of risk. Those participants who received the risk narrative were significantly more likely than the control group to indicate that Christa should not forgive Rob. This is a particularly interesting finding in light of the fact that there were no significant main effects of risk for evaluations of the severity of the transgression, the amount of blame they believed Rob should shoulder for his actions, judgements of the negative effect of the transgression on the relationship, or what the participants themselves would do if they were the victim of this transgression. It is possible that while the thoughts and feelings associated with perceived risk were not sufficient to alter participants' evaluations of the transgression or perpetrator, their fears of invalidity increased their concerns about forgiving a perpetrator who may not deserve it. As a result, although both the risk and control groups saw the transgression in similar ways, the risk group was unwilling to take the chance on suggesting Christa forgive the perpetrator.

The only transgression evaluation index for which a significant interaction was found concerned participants' impressions of the severity of the transgression. While all three context conditions differed significantly from one another in the control condition (a testament to the power of the context effect), in the risk condition, the aggravating and no context groups did not differ significantly from one another. This suggests that

exposure to risk can have the same effect on participants' impressions of a transgression as additional aggravating contextual information.

One explanation for this finding is that participants may have viewed the additional aggravating context statements as verification of their risky thoughts and the feelings associated with them. If this is the case, then the aggravating context served to justify but not exacerbate the negativity of their judgements. This argument is supported by the fact that, within the no context condition, participants who read the risk narrative ($M = 6.00$; $SD = .62$) interpreted the transgression significantly more negatively than did those who read the control narrative ($M = 5.66$; $SD = .72$), $F(1,32) = 6.08$, $p = .02$. This may mean that exposure to risk has shifted participants' thoughts in a more pessimistic, cautious direction (as is evidenced clearly in the no context condition), and giving them additional aggravating context serves only to verify the negative impressions of the situation they already hold.

Evaluations of the Additional Context

Extending work by Reeder and Brewer (1979) and others which indicated that negative information is more likely to be seen as useful when making certain types of judgements (e.g., moral judgements) than positive information, I expected that participants in the aggravating context condition would see the information they received as more relevant, clear, informative, and worthy of serious consideration than would those who received extenuating context. I also expected that those who received aggravating context would not feel the need to receive any further information before they could justify condemning Rob for his actions.

A marginally significant main effect of context was found for participants' ratings of the informational value of the additional context statements. Contrary to my expectations however, participants in the extenuating context condition tended to rate the additional information they received as more relevant, clear, informative, and deserving of serious consideration than participants in the aggravating condition rated their additional context. One possible explanation for this pattern of results would suggest that the theory proposed by Reeder and Brewer may only hold true for evaluations of people's moral dispositional characteristics (e.g., honesty) and not for the more complex judgements of moral issues such as blame. In this study, we have applied Reeder and Brewer's theory beyond the level for which it was originally intended. It is certainly possible that in doing so, we were mistaken in how far beyond dispositional characteristics the theory would hold true. However, work by Alicke (2000) would suggest that this is not necessarily the case, particularly in the case of blame assignment. Alicke's work has found that for judgements of blame, a pattern similar to that proposed by Reeder and Brewer for use of mitigating and blame-enhancing information exists. The results found in this study indicate that further investigation into this phenomenon is certainly warranted.

At a more concrete level of examination, the aggravating context used in the present study does not appear to contain any specific evidence that Rob was unfaithful. The evidence provided to participants in the aggravating context condition tends to be of a general nature (e.g., "Rob has openly admitted to cheating on Michelle more than one time during their two years. If he did it to her, he could do it to me"). At no point does anyone catch Rob and his ex-girlfriend "en flagrante delecto", nor does anyone tell

Christa that Rob did anything wrong. On the other hand, the extenuating context deals much more specifically with the details of what went on in the apartment that night (e.g., “When Rob said Michelle and Jeff were asleep in the bedroom, I didn’t hear (or ignored) the Jeff part and immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion.”). This is fairly concrete evidence that Rob and Michelle did not engage in any inappropriate behaviour. It is also clear, directly relevant, and very informative. It should come as no surprise therefore, that participants thought so too.

There is some tentative evidence that risk also affected participants’ evaluations of the context. The control group was marginally more likely to rate additional contextual information more informative, relevant, clear, and of serious value in deciding whether or not Rob deserved to be forgiven than were risk participants who appeared to be more skeptical and less trusting of additional context. These findings, in conjunction with the work of Reeder and Brewer (1979) and others (Alicke, 2000; Martijn et al, 1992; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987), would lead one to expect a significant interaction between risk and context such that the risk participants would be more likely to praise the merits of the aggravating context and devalue the additional extenuating context. This hypothesis was not supported, however. The interaction between risk and context was non-significant. Indeed, risk appeared to make people skeptical of the value of additional context of any kind. It is possible therefore, that we were incorrect in assuming that fear of invalidity inspires a directional approach to information search. Perhaps instead of seeking out information that will prevent them from making a particular assumption (i.e., the perpetrator is not guilty), participants who were exposed to risk were more concerned with simply making an accurate judgement. This is possible since the participants in this

study are judging the actions of someone they do not know and therefore have no personal stake in the outcome. Lacking this personal motivation to protect themselves or someone they know from the consequences of a particular judgement, these participants may have been more concerned with accuracy instead.

Interpreting the results for the remainder of the context analyses (i.e., how “good” is the context) is more difficult. In evaluating the merits of the additional context they were given, participants in the aggravating and extenuating conditions were asked to answer different questions. Items designed for the aggravating condition involved rating the usefulness of the context in “condemning” Rob’s behaviour. The extenuating context items asked about the use of the context in regard to “excusing” Rob’s behaviour. For the purposes of analysis, the scores for the aggravating context group were reverse coded so that all answers were scaled according to how well the information “excused/justified” Rob’s behaviour. Of course, this analytic strategy rests on the assumption that “condemning” and “excusing” are antonyms, and, in this case, can be represented as two endpoints on the same continuum.

Risk appears to have had no effect on any of the four individual context evaluation items (i.e., judgements of “good at excusing”, “extent to which it excuses”, “justifies” Rob’s actions, and how much more information you would need before excusing Rob’s behaviour). Nor were significant interactions found. The main effect of context, however, was significant for each of the four items, although it was manifested in several unexpected ways.

One item that demonstrated the effect of context asked “To what extent does the context excuse Rob’s behaviour?”. In the absence of a risk effect, this item essentially

serves as a manipulation check for context. Given the nature of the information they received (e.g., “Michelle had moved into Rob’s old apartment with Rob’s friend, Jeff. They have been seeing each other since shortly after she and Rob broke up, and living together for a couple of months now”), participants in the extenuating context condition, understandably, felt the information they received better excused Rob’s behaviour than did the information received by the aggravating context condition. All this really means is that the context was perceived as it was originally designed to be, with the aggravating context making Rob’s behaviour appear more blameworthy and thus less forgivable than the extenuating context. The same interpretation holds true for the item asking “how good is the context in terms of excusing Rob’s behaviour?”.

Context also influenced participants’ responses to the question “to what extent does the context provided justify Rob’s behaviour?”. Again, the extenuating context was rated as being better able to justify Rob’s actions than was the aggravating context. One possible explanation for these results is that participants may have been applying their additional context statements to understanding the “wrong” transgression. In the transgression account, there are technically two transgressions, the fact that Rob stayed in the same apartment with his ex-girlfriend, and also the fact that he got angry at Christa when she confronted him with her concerns. If participants were looking for justification for Rob getting angry at Christa, the extenuating context provided plenty of it. On the other hand, nothing in the aggravating context statements justifies either of the two potential transgressions.

The final item in this set asks participants to indicate how much more information they would need before being able to justify forgiving Rob. The significant main effect

of context was in direct opposition to my original hypothesis. I had expected that those who had received additional aggravating context would report needing significantly more information before they would be able to justify forgiving Rob than would participants in the extenuating context condition because the aggravating context was designed to make Rob appear very worthy of shouldering blame. Strangely, though, it was extenuating context participants who wanted more information before making this final decision. Reeder and Brewer's (1979) work would suggest that this is occurring because the extenuating (positive) information is being undervalued. This explanation is contradicted by earlier evidence, however, wherein the extenuating context was seen to be marginally more relevant, clear, and informative than the aggravating context. If this is so, why then would participants who already received extenuating or excusing context need more of it before they could justify forgiving? A logical explanation for this unorthodox result is unknown at this time, but remains the object of intense consideration.

The final evaluation of the context measures examined how cautious participants feel the need to be when deciding whether or not to accept or reject additional information. Again, the results for this index are confusing. First, consistent with Boon and Holmes (1999), perceived risk shifted participants' thoughts in a more cautious direction. Risk participants were significantly more likely than control participants to report that they would exercise caution in deciding whether or not to use additional contextual information. This supports the cautious processing model which argues that indirect exposure to risk fuels people's fears of invalidity (Kruglanski, 1990) which in turn, makes people more cautious in their information processing and judgements. Importantly, however, the main effect of context is in the opposite direction of my

predictions. Those who received aggravating context indicated they would be more cautious in using the additional information than did those who received extenuating context. This contradicts past research (Alicke, 2000; Martijn, Spears, Van Der Pligt, & Jakobs, 1992; Reeder and Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987) which asserted that people will more readily accept and use negative information than they will positive information, and may well be linked to participants evaluations of the extenuating context as being more relevant, clear, and informative. If nothing else, these findings indicate that more work needs to be done before further examining the effects of risk on use of additional context.

Preference for positive versus negative information

As noted previously, past research (Alicke, 2000; Martijn et al, 1992; Reeder and Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987) would have us believe that, when asked to make certain types of judgements (e.g., evaluating moral dispositional characteristics or blameworthiness), people will prefer negative information over positive information. Furthermore, the cautious processing model proposes that risk participants in particular, should prefer to receive negative evidence so that they can be sure they have not erred in excusing someone who should have been condemned (i.e., because positive evidence is not usually considered as diagnostic negative evidence and may, therefore be unsafe to rely on). Thus it came as a shock that a substantial majority, over three-quarters of participants in this study, indicated that they would prefer to obtain additional positive evidence (that Rob's motives were unselfish) than negative evidence (that Rob's motives were selfish). A careful look at the wording of the question we posed to participants, however, may help to explain the mystery behind this finding.

The question asks “If it were the only kind of evidence you could obtain, which type of evidence would you prefer?”. The two options were “positive” evidence that Rob’s motives were unselfish or benevolent and “negative” evidence that Rob’s motives were selfish or inconsiderate. The Oxford English Reference dictionary (1996) defines “evidence” as “the available facts, circumstances, etc. supporting a belief, proposition, etc., indicating whether a thing is true or valid; statements or proofs”. “Information” on the other hand is defined as “something told; knowledge”. By using the term “evidence” in the question, I believe I unintentionally led participants to believe that the “positive evidence” they could receive would, without a doubt, exonerate Rob, and that it could definitively prove his motives were unselfish or benevolent. As fair, open-minded individuals, why would participants not prefer that type of information?

I also asked participants how much positive evidence they would need before concluding Rob truly cares about Christa and how much negative evidence they would need to conclude he does not. Neither risk nor context affected participants’ reports of their need for negative evidence in this case. For positive evidence, however, those who received aggravating context were marginally more likely than those who received no context to need a lot of positive evidence. Both of those groups however, were significantly more likely to want lots of positive evidence than were those participants who received extenuating context. Since the information given to the extenuating context condition demonstrates fairly clearly that Rob does truly care for Christa (e.g., “When he got home, Rob apologized for having worried me...”) this result is not surprising.

This leaves only the indices dealing with participants’ propensities to ask loaded questions. An interesting pattern of results was obtained for these items. First,

participants in the aggravating context condition were significantly more likely to want to ask negatively loaded or accusatory questions (e.g., “How could you have any good reason for acting the way you did in this situation?”) than either the no context or extenuating context condition. Risk had no effect on propensity for asking negatively loaded questions, either alone or in combination with context.

In contrast, results for positively loaded or excusing questions revealed a significant interaction between risk and context, but no main effects. Control participants who received extenuating context were significantly more likely than control participants in either the no context or the aggravating conditions to want to ask positively loaded or excusing questions (e.g., “Were the circumstances in this situation so stressful that you couldn’t possibly avoid acting the way you did?”). Within the risk condition, there was no difference between the aggravating, no context, and extenuating context conditions. In other words, regardless of what type of additional context they received, participants in the risk condition were equally likely to prefer asking positively loaded or excusing questions.

Recall

The presence of a significant main effect of risk for the amount of information participants recalled from the risk and control narratives indicated that control participants were recalling more pieces of information from their narrative than participants in the risk condition recalled from theirs. I believe this result is related to the greater amount of concrete details (“we had burgers and shakes”) available for recall in the control narrative. The risk narrative overall involves much more abstract ideas (“maybe you have to break up in order to realize clearly just what it is that you’ve lost”).

A cursory examination of the top five most commonly recalled items from the control narrative tends to support this hypothesis.

The most frequently recalled items from the control narrative were: they went to a movie (66.2%), Stephen says Danielle was the first to express interest (63.5%), it was raining so hard it was impossible for them to work (62.2%), the boss gave them the rest of the day off (59.5%), and Danielle's friend thought he was paying more attention to her than he would if his mind was on what he was doing (58.1%). Participants' preference for recalling concrete details is also partially supported by considering the recall data from the risk group. The most commonly recalled items from the risk narrative included: Danielle was really hurt (59.2%), Danielle was caught off-guard when he finally told her how he felt (48.7%), they had been together for 14 months (47.4%), Stephen told her he still cared about her as a friend (42.1%), and since the breakup, Danielle has begun to notice all the ways she depended on Stephen (32.9%).

Participants also showed a small inclination towards recalling the gist of what they had read as opposed to recalling specific information, in contrast to the literature on memory which indicates that people are significantly more likely to remember gist than actual phrasing (Brewer, 1977). For example, several participants referred to Danielle and Stephen's relationship as a good one that had faded away overtime. This minor tendency to recall the gist of what they had read could be attributed to the fact that the recall task followed a large number of other questionnaires, and since participants had been focused exclusively on the transgression account it may be that this interference reduced some participants' ability to recall specific detail (Reisberg, 1997). Under those

circumstances, recalling the gist of what they read might have been the best some participants could do.

One interesting observation is the propensity of a very small number of participants to analyze or give their opinions about the relationship they read about. For example, one participant wrote “She seems to have been in love with the idea more than the actual relationship with Stephen”. These inclusions could be a function of participants’ experience in the field of psychological research (i.e., fourth year students may feel the need to use what they have learned), different ideas about what is expected of a research participant (i.e., “it’s a study of processing information about relationships, therefore they must want me to do more than just remember what I read”), or simply a matter of those participants incorrectly interpreting the instructions.

What we did not see were “intrusion errors”, that is information that is recalled but is not actually present in the narrative (Johnson, Bransford, & Solomon, 1973). Given the emotional nature of the risk narrative in particular, we might have expected to see participants “filling in the blanks” or allowing their personal feelings and thoughts to be included in their recall of the information contained in the narrative. This absence of intrusion errors may be, in part, due to decay of the risk effect. If the risk effect does deteriorate due to the passage of time, the “emotional involvement” one might expect from the risk narrative may no longer be salient when it comes time to complete the recall task.

In Sum...

Essentially, this study has demonstrated the powerful effect of context on participants’ evaluations of transgressions. Additional aggravating context shifted

participants' evaluations of transgressions in a more negative and cautious direction. Participants who received extenuating context on the other hand, were more lenient in their evaluations of the transgression and its perpetrator, extending the benefit of the doubt and, as a result, more forgiving.

There is only tentative support for the idea that risk shifted people's thoughts and evaluations in more pessimistic, cautious directions. Although this is disappointing I believe that it is important to take two things into account. First, the risk effect found in Boon and Holmes (1999) was significant, but fairly small. Second, as stated above, the effect of the additional context participants were given in this study was very strong. These two things in combination, I believe served to substantially reduce the odds of obtaining the predicted main effects of risk and interactions between risk and context.

It is also possible however, that when we are asked to make these types of moral judgements, the contextual information available to us is more influential than our cognitive or emotional state. The prescriptive criteria Shaver (1985) and Weiner (1995) suggest we use for making judgements of responsibility and blame focus on information that we could only get from examining the context surrounding a negative event. For example, Shaver (1985) focuses on causality, knowledge, intentionality, possibility of coercion, and the perpetrator's appreciation of the moral wrongfulness of his or her actions as the basic building blocks of blame judgements. In order to make an inference based on these criteria, one would have to make a careful examination of not only the transgression itself but of the context in which it occurred. The no context conditions' responses to the blame question support Shaver's perspective. When participants are not given any additional contextual information, they are unsure as to how much blame they

should assign the perpetrator of a transgression. In our study, the mean blame score for the no context condition hovered around the midpoint on the 7-point scale. Without any additional information about such things as knowledge (i.e., of the potential consequences) or intentionality, these participants were unable to decide whether, and in which direction, to adjust their judgements of blame. Further examination of this issue using a stronger risk manipulation is important in order to discern which of these plausible explanations to accept.

Implications

Risk. This study has highlighted some concerns with both the strength of the risk manipulation. There was very little evidence of a risk effect in this study. I believe that this occurred, not because the risk effect does not exist, but because the context effect was so strong that any effect risk may have had was obscured or rendered superfluous. This speculation is supported by the presence of a risk effect on mood, in the manipulation checks, in the no context condition for such indices as impressions of the transgression, as well as by the presence of two interactions. As well, in many instances within the risk group, the no context and aggravating context conditions did not differ significantly from one another. This indicates that perhaps risk is having an effect on those participants thoughts and feelings and being given aggravating context statements serves only to verify the judgements the participants have already made, instead of exacerbating the negativity of their thoughts and feelings.

Reeder and Brewer's (1979) theory of behaviour restriction. Contrary to what I predicted based on the work of Reeder and Brewer (as well as Martijn, Spears, Van Der Pligt, & Jakobs, 1992; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987), participants found the extenuating

context more diagnostic and informative than aggravating context. This suggests that there may be situations, circumstances, types of judgements, or even types of additional information, for which this theory does not hold true. As mentioned earlier, we may have been overly optimistic when we decided to extend Reeder and Brewer's argument beyond the realm of dispositional inferences and into the area of moral judgements of blame. Although there is evidence (Alicke, 2000) that this effort may not have been misguided it is obvious from the results of this study that further examination into people's perceptions of the diagnosticity of contextual information is needed.

This study does, however, demonstrate the power of context. By carefully choosing what type of contextual information to impart, we can have a very strong influence on how we ourselves are perceived and how we present others. As well, we must try to be cognizant of the strength of the influence context can have when we are the receivers of the additional information. It is therefore important to ask yourself "what type of inference is this person, intentionally or unintentionally, guiding me towards and why would that be?".

Limitations of this Study

The risk manipulation. One of the most important limitations of this study was the risk manipulation itself. In future research, this risk manipulation may need to be bolstered, either by changing the content of the narrative itself or the method of delivery. I hesitate to suggest changing the content since it has worked in previous research (Boon & Holmes, 1999). I do believe however that with some modifications, the method of delivery could enhance the narrative's effectiveness in priming perceptions of the risk involved in being in a romantic relationship.

One approach to bolstering the power of the risk manipulation would be to intentionally focus participants on the risks involved in relationships. One way of doing so would be to have participants read the narrative and then ask them to list as many specific relationship risks as possible. This would focus their thoughts on not only the fact that there are risks inherent in romantic relationships but also on what those risks can be. One would have to be careful however, not to phrase this in such a way that they feel their own relationship has been directly threatened, otherwise reassurance seeking may result. As well, it is important to take into consideration the possibility that the risk effect is sensitive to decay over time. Given the number of dependent variables in this study, this may well be a concern. In future studies it would be prudent to reinforce participants' perceptions of the risk involved in romantic relationship periodically during the tasks in order to avoid the possibility of decay influencing responses.

Transgression account. If this account were to be used in future projects, it would behoove the researcher to ascertain what participants view the transgression as being. In this case, we have no way of knowing whether participants were judging Rob on his overnight stay with his ex-girlfriend, or on his angry reaction to Christa confronting him with it. After reading the account, participants could be asked to describe in one sentence what the transgression was or, alternatively, the recall task could be changed such that the transgression account and the accompanying context statements are its focus. Another intriguing possibility would be to have participants evaluate both of the "transgressions". This might lead to some very interesting differences in evaluations since staying overnight is a more indirect transgression against Christa (particularly if, as in the extenuating context condition, she did know the ex-girlfriend lived there) while Rob's

angry response to Christa when she confronted him is a very direct transgression against her.

Context statements. A third limitation to this study concerns the context statements. Although through pilot testing, I attempted to ensure that the aggravating and extenuating context statements were matched on their levels of informative value, ultimately the extenuating context was seen as more relevant, clear, and informative than the aggravating context. In the original pilot study, participants were asked to evaluate these context statements in random order. In the main study, we presented the context statements in order from least to most informative. Perhaps there is something about presenting the context in order of increasing strength which makes the extenuating context appear more informative etc. than the aggravating context. Steps must now be taken to ascertain if this is the case and to attempt to balance the information presented to each group.

Another consideration in this process is the focus of the context itself. The extenuating context appears to be more firmly rooted in the event that has occurred, while the aggravating context tends more towards inferences about Rob's guilt. For example, the final piece of information that each group received was rated, in a pilot study, to be the most informative and relevant. For the aggravating group this item reads "Rob has openly admitted to cheating on Michelle more than one time during their two years. If he did it to her, he could do it to me." This information gives one the sense that in past relationships, Rob has not been trustworthy. However, the final piece of information the extenuating context group receives reads "When Rob said Michelle and Jeff were asleep in the bedroom, I didn't hear (or ignored) the Jeff part and immediately jumped to the

wrong conclusion. No wonder Rob was ticked with me!” This is certainly more concrete evidence that is directly relevant to the situation at hand. This discrepancy may play an important role in the differences in evaluations between those who received extenuating and those who were given aggravating context. There are also no filler statements. Each and every piece of information participants’ received was progressively more excusing (or in the case of aggravating context, more condemning) than the one before it. Filler statements (e.g., “last night I saw a really good movie”) would mean that the participant would have to decide what information was relevant and what could be disregarded.

This study was also limited by the items designed to evaluate the criteria for using additional context. In several cases, this evaluation was undermined by poor question construction. As a result, any inferences based on their analysis should be considered questionable. In the absence of a risk effect, what I had intended to be meaningful dependent variables (e.g., how “good” is the context at excusing Rob’s behaviour”) appear to have served as little more than manipulation checks for context. Even had this not been the case, recoding the aggravating context condition questions and then comparing the results may have been an invalid way to analyze these data. It is also possible that the term “condemn” has stronger connotations attached to it than does the term “excuse”. For example, while they may exist on the same continuum, “excusing” may not be the strongest anchoring counterpart for condemning. Perhaps the term “forgiving” would have been a more appropriate anchor for this continuum. Future research should endeavour to find a way to ask these questions (i.e., “how good is the context at excusing/condemning Rob’s behaviour”) in such a way that would allow a clearer, more direct comparison between the extenuating and aggravating context.

Cognitions vs. Affect: What Are “Risk” Perceptions Made Of?

This study does not permit me to say decisively whether the effect of risk is primarily cognitive or affective in nature. The work of several well known researchers in the field of cognition and emotion suggests that exposure to a simple negative mood manipulation can have the same effect on people’s evaluations of negative events as exposure to risk (Bless & Schwarz, 1996; Bless & Schwarz, 1999; Forgas, 1995; Forgas & Bower, 1987; Johnson & Tversky, 1983; Mayer et al, 1992; Rholes et al, 1987; Schwartz and Clore, 1996). It is possible, therefore, that it is, at least in part, the negative mood created by the perception of risk that shifts people’s evaluations of the transgressions in a more pessimistic or cautious direction, rather than the cognitive effects of perceived risk.

I could argue that negative mood is a naturally occurring component of risk. In fact, Lopes (1987) argues that scientific treatments of risk tend to ignore the emotional or affective component of risk perception. In most domains of life, instances of risk would not inspire positive moods. For example, few of us are emotionally unaffected by the possibility that our relationships, or indeed relationships in general, are in jeopardy. Such a confound presents a difficulty in discerning the effects the cognitions association with perceptions of risk have on evaluations of transgressions, separate from the feelings of vulnerability that risk elicits. The question then remains “was it risk-related cognitions or the negative mood that accompanies perceived risk, or a combination thereof, that shifted these individuals’ thought processes in more cautious directions?”.

The problem with answering this question is finding a way to invoke risk without also invoking negative mood. Ideally you would want to invoke the negative mood and

the thoughts of risk in similar ways in order to eliminate the possibility that it is the way the manipulation is delivered, and not the result of the manipulation itself, which is influencing peoples judgements. This is very difficult to do in the realm of the relational transgression research since reading about the transgression alone could invoke both negative mood and concerns about risk in relationships.

A second issue is also worthy of consideration. If you accept that negative mood is an inherent part of perceived risk, the question could then be raised "Does risk prime negative mood or does negative mood prime thoughts of risk?". While this type of analysis would be interesting and potentially illuminating, I lack a "clean" measure of risk that would enable me to put this speculation to the test. At this point in time, the only measures of the effect of risk that I have are the general and personal relationship schema measures which there is every reason to believe are themselves susceptible to the effects of negative mood. Without a valid measure of risk that is free from the influence of negative mood (and vice versa), I cannot begin to create a path model that would begin to explain the effects that risk and negative mood have on each other and on attributions.

Suggestions for Future Research

Refining the present study: The risk manipulation. Obviously there is still a great deal of work to do in order to bolster the strength of the risk manipulation. The possibility of using a different mode of delivery needs to be examined and pilot tested before re-running this study. Ideas that have been suggested include using a movie clip to promote perceptions of risk, and exposing participants to the risk narrative and then having them list as many relationship risks as they can think of. This latter approach in particular is interesting since it would have participants interacting more with the

materials and drawing on their own experiences as well as those of others. It would also be useful to design a study that would allow us to examine how long the effect of risk perception persists, that is, how long does it take before people's perceptions of risk in relationships begins to decay.

A closer examination of people's use of context. Another avenue that appears worthy of consideration is having participants return to the list of context statements after completing the measures and asking them to rank the statements in order from most to least influential in terms of how they influenced their judgements. This would allow us to determine if there are different types of contextual information that participants prefer. For example, they may find information about the circumstances surrounding the incident itself (e.g., "He came home with what looked an awful lot like a hickey on his neck") more informative, relevant, and clear than information about the type of person the perpetrator usually is (e.g., "I was really surprised when he didn't disagree with one of his friends who said that cheating isn't really a big deal").

How much and what kinds of context do people want? Two further studies have been planned to extend the present research. The first involves examining how exposure to risk affects people's interest in seeking additional contextual information. Shifting to an "information seeking" paradigm means that participants will receive the option of requesting additional context or not. This means that we will be able to examine the amount of context people need before committing themselves to a judgement. This will also allow us to determine what the pivotal pieces of contextual information might be. Participants will be assigned to one of three kinds of context, all extenuating, all aggravating, or a combination of the two. Participants may request up to five additional

pieces of context information and may proceed at any time to the judgements in the questionnaire. The researchers will monitor the number of pieces of information requested and, in the case of the mixed condition, whether the final piece of information requested was aggravating or extenuating context.

The second study will extend one step further by not only allowing participants to choose the amount of additional context they need, but also to choose what type of context they would like. Participants in study three will be allowed to request pieces of both aggravating and extenuating context and will be allowed to access up to ten pieces of additional information in total. By making this change, the researchers will be able to monitor not only how much information participants requested but also the ratio of aggravating to extenuating context sought.

Effects of risk on decision-making. If we can find a way to elicit a relatively strong risk effect, another avenue of research would involve shifting from the present focus on the effects of risk on evaluation to a focus on the effects of risk on decision making. By using an attitude / persuasion paradigm it would be possible to investigate how perceptions of risk affect the elaboration of arguments concerning an important relationship decision (e.g., whether to cohabit or get married). Risk and control participants would read arguments that varied both in terms of whether they endorse or oppose a particular position (i.e., endorsing cohabitation / opposing marriage) and argument strength (strong versus weak). I would expect that perceived risk would motivate participants to engage in systematic (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989) or central-route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) processing. This type of processing is viewed as more cautious, considered and fact-based than its counterpart, heuristic processing (in

which people are more influenced by peripheral cues such as perceived expertise of the message source). Therefore, compared to a control group, I expect that the decisions risk participants make will be most influenced by strong arguments and, if my interpretation of Reeder and Brewer (1979) is correct, particularly strong “con” arguments.

In Conclusion...

The purpose of this study was to examine one of the ways in which indirect exposure to risk could shift people’s thought processing in a more cautious direction, namely through influencing how people use additional context information. Because the risk manipulation did not produce a sufficiently strong effect, I was virtually unable to evaluate its influence on the use of context. However, once the risk manipulation is bolstered and the measures are modified, I intend to address this important question again.

Despite the limitations of this study, I believe I have demonstrated that context is a very important and influential part of the process of drawing inferences about the character and behaviour of others. Further study into the relationship between perceptions of risk and the use of additional contextual information can only add to our knowledge of how and why we judge others as we do.

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Appendix A

Pilot Study Content Statement Matching on Informational Value

Extenuating Context	Aggravating Context
<p>When Robert said Michelle and Jeff were asleep in the bedroom, I didn't hear (or ignored) the Jeff part and immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion. No wonder Robert was ticked with me!</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 1.52; <u>SD</u> = .85)</p>	<p>Robert has openly admitted to cheating on Michelle more than one time during their two years. But if he did it to her, he could do it to me.</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 1.45; <u>SD</u> = .51)</p>
<p>Michelle had moved into Robert's old apartment with Robert's friend, Jeff. They have been seeing each other since shortly after she and Robert broke up, and living together for a couple of months now.</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 1.78; <u>SD</u> = .52)</p>	<p>I asked Robert if he wanted me to drive to Queen's with him. He said no, that he would be all right by himself. I began to worry though when he told me not to bother calling while he was there, he'd be in and out all evening.</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 1.77; <u>SD</u> = .75)</p>
<p>When he got home, Robert apologized for having worried me, and said that he should have made sure that I understood the situation with Michelle and Jeff and the apartment before he left.</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 1.87; <u>SD</u> = .92)</p>	<p>At first, Robert denied that his visitor was still there, but from the way he kept trying to change the subject, I figured that wasn't true.</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 1.86; <u>SD</u> = .89)</p>

(table continues)

Extenuating Context con't	Aggravating Context con't
<p>I know that Robert is very committed to “us”. We have talked about moving in together and I know he’d never jeopardize our relationship for a “one night stand” with Michelle.</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 2.17; <u>SD</u> = 1.30)</p>	<p>What really burns me is the way Robert seemed more interested in keeping Michelle entertained that in talking to me when I phoned. Aren’t I more important than some girl he used to date?</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 2.00; <u>SD</u> = 1.11)</p>
<p>We’ve been going out for just under a year now and apart from this stuff with the ex’s, Robert hasn’t given me any reason not to trust what he says about what he’s doing.</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 2.35; <u>SD</u> = 1.07)</p>	<p>It worries me that when I confronted him, Robert turned the situation around and got mad at me! I’m not the one with an ex-boyfriend sleeping across the hall from me!</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 2.14; <u>SD</u> = 1.08)</p>
<p>Honesty is really important to Robert, so I really should believe him when he says nothing happened that night. He was angry with me because he thought I was accusing him of being dishonest.</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 2.48; <u>SD</u> = 1.04)</p>	<p>When he called back that night, Robert sounded really uncomfortable, nervous, like he was putting on the happy act. I got the impression that something wasn’t quite right, and that whatever it was, I wasn’t going to like it.</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 2.41; <u>SD</u> = .91)</p>

(table continues)

Extenuating Context con't	Aggravating Context con't
<p>I decided not to keep him on the line because I could hear at least two other voices in the background, a guy and a girl, and I didn't want to interrupt. I know he would call me back later when his guests had left.</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 2.70; <u>SD</u> = 1.40)</p>	<p>I don't know why I shouldn't worry about Michelle...she is always sending Robert little "thinking of you" cards and calling him to talk about "old times". She hasn't crossed the line yet but she's come close more than once!</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 2.73; <u>SD</u> = 1.24)</p>
<p>Michelle is involved in a pretty serious new relationship at this point. I guess this means I really shouldn't worry about her being interested in Robert.</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 2.78; <u>SD</u> = 1.24)</p>	<p>I've always made sure Robert doesn't have to worry about my ex's, but he doesn't take my concerns about his ex-girlfriends seriously. He knows how I feel when he makes a point of calling them or seeing them.</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 2.77; <u>SD</u> = 1.15)</p>
<p>I am a little paranoid about the ex issue. It's a real sore spot with me, I've been burned before, so I suppose I overreacted when I found out it was Michelle that caused Robert's delay in calling me back.</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 2.91; <u>SD</u> = 1.13)</p>	<p>Once or twice Robert's laughed at me when I told him that I feel uncomfortable knowing that he still keeps in touch with his ex's.</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 2.95; <u>SD</u> = 1.13)</p>

(table continues)

Extenuating Context con't	Aggravating Context con't
<p>Just because they broke up doesn't mean they can't be friends. I'm the one who has the problem with ex's, both my own (none of us are very friendly) and Robert's (it makes me uncomfortable to see them together).</p> <p>(<u>M</u> = 2.96; <u>SD</u> = 1.22)</p>	<p>Why shouldn't I feel threatened by Michelle?</p> <p>This is a girl Robert dated for more than twice as long as we've been going out so far and is living in his old apartment at Queen's.</p> <p>(Converted <u>M</u> = 2.95; <u>SD</u> = 1.29)</p>

Appendix B

Materials

CONTROL NARRATIVE

The following is an account of an event that occurred in real life romantic relationship. It was supplied by a former student of Dr. Boon who participated in her dissertation research at the University of Waterloo. Please read the following narrative carefully.

Couple #12 : Danielle & Stephen

Relationship length: 14 months

Status: exclusively dating/quite serious

I'm supposed to write about how my relationship began. My boyfriend, Stephen and I met a little more than a year ago while working for Parks and Rec over the summer. I had just finished my second year of university, and he had just moved to the city after working out of province for a couple of years in his uncle's business out in Vancouver. It was tough to get a job that summer but somehow we were both lucky and managed to get on with the city.

We were assigned to the same work crew so obviously we met right away, I mean on the first day of work in early May. But it wasn't as though we fell in love at first sight or anything like that. It actually took several weeks for things to even begin to develop. I

suppose it might have been different if either one of us had been looking for a relationship at the time but neither of us was.

I'm sure if you asked him to describe how we met, Stephen's story would be a little different than mine. I know, for example, he thinks that I was the first one to express interest in him. I don't think I agree. One of my best friends was also on our work crew and she was the one that pointed him out to me one day while we were laying sod in a new playground area somewhere. She told me that he had this funny way of looking at me whenever my work brought us near to each other, like he was kind of paying me more attention than you'd expect if his mind was on other things. I had no idea what she was talking about, of course, so I more or less ignored what she said. But when it was time to go back to the shop for lunch and we were piling into the trucks for the drive back, I caught Stephen watching me while I was walking past the truck he was driving and I began to wonder if my friend was right after all. Like I said I wasn't really out looking for a relationship, so I kind of just shrugged my shoulders and kept walking, pretty much putting the whole thing out of my mind at the time.

My friend and I were on a coffee break at work the next day and I told her what had happened. She started smiling at me and nodded in the direction of Stephen. She said something like 'so, give it a shot, the guy's been watching your every move for the past few weeks' and basically pushed me in his direction and that was it. I glanced over in Stephen's direction and decided my friend's idea might not be a bad one. Stephen looked at me for a moment with this really intriguing smile and then turned away to continue working.

So, at lunch that day back at the shop I sat beside him and tried to start a conversation. It wasn't the first time we'd sat together over the past several weeks of working together, but it was the first time I really took the time to look at him carefully and listen to what he was saying. It didn't take me too many more days to realize that I liked what I was getting to know about him. Even then it's not as though our relationship developed overnight. We started arranging things so that we could work together when we got the chance, just to talk. And then one day it was raining so hard that it was impossible for any of us to work outside so the boss gave us the rest of the day off. My friend and I were leaving the shop and she kept nudging me and asking me what Stephen was going to do now that we had a half a day free. I was kind of hoping we'd find him somewhere near the door waiting for us on our way out. Well, we left the building and I was just about to give up when I saw him outside just about to climb into his car. He waved to us, and when we came nearer he asked us if we had any plans for the afternoon. We said we didn't, and asked him what he was going to do. He said he didn't know. We invited him to spend the afternoon with us instead of going home and being bored.

After talking about it for a while as we drove around, we all went to the mall and decided to go to a movie. I don't actually remember which one, so it couldn't have been anything exciting. After that we drove around again for a while. We stopped for dinner at some roadside place not far from the mall. The burgers there weren't bad and the milkshakes were pretty good. We talked about a bunch of stuff. I guess mainly work and the people we knew there, some stuff about school as well. My friend and I told him about the camping trip we went on last summer. You know, pretty casual stuff. The

three of us had a pretty good time. We weren't out very late because we had to be back to work early the next day.

I suppose you could call that our first date, even though my friend came with us. There really isn't much more to tell after that.... things just sort of progressed, slowly but comfortably if you know what I mean. So you see, Stephen would tell you that I was the one who made the first move by choosing to sit by him at lunch that day and sort of starting things going. But, in my opinion, and my best friend agrees, Stephen had been sending me subtle signals that he was interested in me for quite a while.

RISK NARRATIVE

The following is an account of an event that occurred in real life romantic relationship. It was supplied by a former student of Dr. Boon who participated in her dissertation research at the University of Waterloo. Please read the following narrative carefully.

Couple #12: Danielle and Stephen

Relationship length: 14 months

Status: exclusively dating/quite serious

I'm supposed to write about how my relationship ended. My boyfriend, Stephen and I broke up several weeks ago after going out for just over a year. I had no idea it was going to hurt so much to lose him. We had a good relationship overall but things just eroded over time, things just changed. I don't know if either one of us had control over it. It just seemed to happen. I wasn't focusing on any negative signs that might have been there.

Stephen said he didn't want to hurt me which is why he had been hesitant to tell me about his doubts about our relationship earlier on. He tried to explain to me how he felt like we'd just sort of grown apart in the last couple of months. In the long run I've ended up hurt anyways and I wish he would have been more open with me when he first started having doubts about our compatibility. He said it was very easy to fall in love with me right from the start, that certainly wasn't the problem, and that we had some

good things going for us in the relationship. But, as time passed, he began to have some doubts about how well we suited each other on a deeper, more serious level. And he didn't want to worry me with his doubts until he was more sure about them.

I always thought I'd know if things were changing in our relationship or coming to an end, but I was caught a little off-guard when he finally told me how he felt. Fourteen months may not be forever, but I invested a lot in this relationship, so did Stephen. I thought this was "it," the relationship that would last, the real thing. So I wasn't really thinking about what might happen if we broke up. I know most dating relationships end at some point or another, but who goes into a relationship saying "Oh, well, this relationship probably won't last"??

In the last weeks I've really begun to notice all the ways I depended on Stephen in our relationship. Maybe you have to break up in order to realize clearly just what it is that you've lost. A good relationship involves learning to depend on one another person. You can't be close to another person unless you're willing to be a bit vulnerable, willing to rely on someone else for some of your needs to be met. Unfortunately, this leaves you open to the possibility of being hurt, although I don't think people want to think like that too much of the time.

I almost wish now that I'd never fallen in love with Stephen because it hurts twice as bad now that it's over. Love's supposed to keep you together, not make it worse when things fall apart. True love is supposed to conquer all. If you really love someone, things are supposed to work out. Maybe I was too naive in believing this. It's partly my fault for getting so involved. I should have been more careful. I should never have let things get to the point where I would end up so hurt. Of course, part of me knows this kind of

pessimistic thinking is just 20-20 hindsight, just my anger at being hurt leaking out, but knowing this doesn't change the way I feel inside.

After thinking about it, I've decided that a good relationship requires just the right fit between two people, and not just on the surface levels, but deeper down, too. It takes a lot of luck and effort to make things work out. Relationships are kind of fragile things. I used to think that because I was a good person nothing bad like this breakup would happen to me. Now I've learned that just being in love isn't a guarantee that you've found the right person for you. Things like that, like whether you and your partner are truly compatible or not, only kind of get tested over the longer term. It's easy to love someone and still be wrong for them. Afterall, when half of all relationships end in divorce, what made me think our relationship would last?

I wasn't thinking about it very realistically, I guess. I thought things were okay because we rarely fought and we talked a whole lot. We never yelled at each other. I also thought that it wouldn't hurt so much if things went wrong and we did break up, because it was such a good relationship that we had. But I was wrong. I guess love means acknowledging the fact that you're depending on someone else and that it can really hurt when that someone else leaves.

I'm feeling pretty vulnerable right now because I've realized that getting involved with someone is just risky as hell. I've realized just how fragile relationships really are, how many things can change, how the chemistry of fitting together is just so damn delicate. There's so much to lose when you get close to another person, and being in a relationship is a huge investment. I don't like to admit it, but I was hurt this time. Love isn't any promise of security.

Sometimes it makes me wonder why we bother at all. Why do we believe in these illusions about love and happiness and always being together? Maybe we just need to think this way or we'd be too insecure to ever get involved? Stephen told me he still cares about me as a friend, but that doesn't make me feel any better. We were so much more than "just" friends. I really feel hurt, I can't help taking this personally. We had so much invested in this relationship. I don't want to be just friends.

TRANSGRESSION ACCOUNT

The following is an account of a negative incident that occurred in real life romantic relationship. It was supplied by a former student of Dr. Boon who participated in her dissertation research at the University of Waterloo. Please read the following narrative carefully. As you are reading through this account, try to imagine yourself as Christa in this situation.

Name: Christa
Age: 22 years
Occupation: Full time student at the University of Waterloo
Year of study: Third
Major: Economics
Length of relationship: 1 year
Relationship Classification: Exclusive dating/quite serious

Christa's Story

“My negative experience occurred quite recently. I gave my boyfriend, Rob, a call on Wednesday knowing that he would probably be in (about 1:30 a.m.). Early in the conversation it was obvious that he had company, so I let him get back to whatever he was doing. He promised to call me back a little later.

At about 4:30 a.m. I got that return call. I asked Rob why he was calling so late, and he said he wanted to wait until Michelle, his ex-girlfriend, was asleep (in another room) before he called. I flipped! Michelle has always been a sore spot with me. Rob couldn't understand why I was upset, since he said he had told me a long time ago that she was staying in his old apartment at Queen's University after he had moved back to Toronto (He was just at Queen's for the night picking up some of his stuff).

Needless to say, I became pretty defensive, since to my knowledge this was the first time I had heard anything about this living arrangement. Instead of reassuring me, though, he attacked, asking that I give him a little credit and saying that if I was going to feel threatened, it shouldn't be from Michelle."

AGGRAVATING CONTEXT STATEMENTS

In a separate exercise, the author of the previous account also supplied this additional information about the incident:

Why shouldn't I feel threatened by Michelle? This is a girl Rob dated for more than twice as long as we've been going out so far and is living in his old apartment at Queen's.

Once or twice Rob's laughed at me when I told him that I feel uncomfortable knowing that he still keeps in touch with his ex's.

I've always made sure Rob doesn't have to worry about my ex's, but he doesn't take my concerns about his ex-girlfriends seriously. He knows how I feel when he makes a point of calling them or seeing them.

I don't know why I shouldn't worry about Michelle...she is always sending Rob little "thinking of you" cards and calling him to talk about "old times". She hasn't crossed the line yet but she's come close more than once!

When he called back that night, Rob sounded really uncomfortable, nervous, like he was putting on the happy act. I got the impression that something wasn't quite right, and that whatever it was, I wasn't going to like it.

It worries me that when I confronted him, Rob turned the situation around and got mad at me! I'm not the one with an ex-love sleeping across the hall from me!

What really burns me is the way Rob seemed more interested in keeping Michelle entertained than in talking to me when I phoned. Aren't I more important than some girl he used to date?

At first, Rob denied that his visitor was still there, but from the way he kept trying to change the subject, I figured that wasn't true.

I asked Rob if he wanted me to drive to Queen's with him. He said no, that he would be all right by himself. I began to worry though when he told me not to bother calling while he was there, he'd be in and out all evening.

Rob has openly admitted to cheating on Michelle more than one time during their two years. If he did it to her, he could do it to me.

EXTENUATING CONTEXT STATEMENTS

In a separate exercise, the author of the previous account also supplied this additional information about the incident:

Just because they broke up doesn't mean they can't be friends. I'm the one who has the problem with ex's, both my own (none of us are very friendly) and Rob's (it makes me uncomfortable to see them together).

I am a little paranoid about the ex issue. It's a real sore spot with me, I've been burned before, so I suppose I overreacted when I found out it was Michelle that caused Rob's delay in calling me back.

Michelle is involved in a pretty serious new relationship at this point. I guess this means I really shouldn't worry about her being interested in Rob.

I decided not to keep him on the line because I could hear at least two other voices in the background, a guy and a girl, and I didn't want to interrupt. I know he would call me back later when his guests had left.

Honesty is really important to Rob, so I really should believe him when he says nothing happened that night. He was angry with me because he thought I was accusing him of being dishonest.

We've been going out for just under a year now and apart from this stuff with the ex's, Rob hasn't given me any reason not to trust what he says about what he's doing.

I know that Rob is very committed to "us". We have talked about moving in together and I know he'd never jeopardize our relationship for a "one night stand" with Michelle.

When he got home, Rob apologized for having worried me, and said that he should have made sure that I understood the situation with Michelle and Jeff and the apartment before he left.

Michelle had moved into Rob's old apartment with Rob's friend, Jeff. They have been seeing each other since shortly after she and Rob broke up, and living together for a couple of months now.

When Rob said Michelle and Jeff were asleep in the bedroom, I didn't hear (or ignored) the Jeff part and immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion. No wonder Rob was ticked with me!

Appendix C

Measures

MOOD CHECKLIST

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Please read each item and then mark the appropriate response in the space next to the word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment. Use the following scale to record your responses:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all			moderately			extremely
	<input type="checkbox"/>	calm			<input type="checkbox"/>	distressed
	<input type="checkbox"/>	tense			<input type="checkbox"/>	content
	<input type="checkbox"/>	happy			<input type="checkbox"/>	upset
	<input type="checkbox"/>	worried			<input type="checkbox"/>	certain
	<input type="checkbox"/>	nervous			<input type="checkbox"/>	relaxed
	<input type="checkbox"/>	composed			<input type="checkbox"/>	uncertain
	<input type="checkbox"/>	sad			<input type="checkbox"/>	satisfied
	<input type="checkbox"/>	comfortable			<input type="checkbox"/>	uneasy
	<input type="checkbox"/>	concerned			<input type="checkbox"/>	confident

MANIPULATION CHECK

For each of the following questions, please circle only ONE answer:

1. The tone of the narrative I just read was:
 - A positive
 - B neutral (neither positive nor negative)
 - C negative

2. The content of the narrative I just read was:
 - A positive
 - B neutral (neither positive nor negative)
 - C negative

3. Overall, the narrative I just read was:
 - A positive
 - B neutral (neither positive nor negative)
 - C negative

GENERAL RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS

Below are some items looking at people's beliefs about what relationships are generally or typically like. Please use the rating scale below to rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. We are interested in your present thoughts about these issues.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strongly						strongly
disagree						agree

___ 1. Any problems that surface in a relationship can be worked through successfully if the partners truly love each other.

___ 2. Most dating relationships at one time or another encounter serious conflicts of interest which threaten their existence.

___ 3. Part of being in a relationship is facing the risk of someday losing the relationship.

___ 4. People often get more dependent on relationships than they ever come to realize until it is too late.

___ 5. The benefits of being in a relationship outweigh the costs.

- ___ 6. I believe a person always knows when her relationship is coming to an end.
- ___ 7. Good relationships become happier and even more satisfying as time goes on.
- ___ 8. Relationships are enormously risky.
- ___ 9. It is difficult for most people to be absolutely certain that their partner will always care for them.
- ___ 10. Most people worry about losing what they've invested in a relationship if it ever breaks up.
- ___ 11. Many things can change in a relationship as time goes on.
- ___ 12. Being in a relationship means putting yourself on the line.
- ___ 13. Part of being in a relationship means being prepared to be hurt.
- ___ 14. If a relationship is coming to end, there are tell-tale signs that are obvious to both partners.
- ___ 15. There are no "guarantees" in relationships.

EVALUATIONS OF THE TRANSGRESSION

The judgements below require you to indicate your own impressions of the situation and the people you just read about.

The incident described in the account was:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
very negative						very positive

Rob's behaviour in this incident was:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
very negative						very positive

In terms of its impact on Christa's relationship with Rob, the incident described was:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all significant						extremely significant

In your opinion, how responsible was Rob for hurting Christa?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all responsible						extremely responsible

In your opinion, how much did Rob intend to hurt Christa?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						extremely

In your opinion, how blameworthy were Rob's actions?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all blameworthy						extremely blameworthy

How likely do you think Christa would be to forgive Rob for his hurtful actions in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all likely						extremely likely

The judgements below will require you to imagine yourself in Christa's position in this situation:

Considering how Christa felt at the time the incident occurred, the incident was:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all upsetting						very upsetting

Putting yourself in Christa's position, how likely do you think you would be to forgive Rob for his hurtful actions if you were the "victim" in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all likely						extremely likely

Again, putting yourself in Christa's position, how much damage do you think this incident would do to your relationship with Rob if you were the victim in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
no damage at all						severe and extensive damage

One last time, putting yourself in Christa's position, please use the scale below to indicate the extent to which you believe each of the following aspects of the your relationship with Rob would be negatively affected in the short term by the incident you read about:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
no short-term negative effect						extreme short-term negative effect

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. _____ closeness | 6. _____ companionship |
| 2. _____ emotional involvement | 7. _____ honesty |
| 3. _____ confiding | 8. _____ security |
| 4. _____ supportiveness | 9. _____ freedom |
| 5. _____ fairness | 10. _____ trust |

- ___ 8. Rob's behaviour in this incident will likely have a negative impact on the relationship in a number of areas.
- ___ 9. Rob is the type of person who is generally responsive to Christa's needs.
- ___ 10. I am suspicious that Rob was motivated to seek his own self-interests in this instance.

EVALUATIONS OF THE CONTEXT STATEMENTS

Aggravating and Extenuating Context Conditions Only

The following set of judgements refer to your impressions of the additional *contextual* information that Christa provided to help you, as an outsider, understand the situation that she described and its place in her relationship with Rob (this refers to the separate sheet of information you were given after having read the narrative). Please respond to each of the following items as openly and honestly as possible. We are interested in your candid opinions about the value or merit of this information.

In your opinion, how informative is the context Christa provided?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all informative						extremely informative

In your opinion, how relevant is the context Christa provided?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all relevant						extremely relevant

In your opinion, how clearly does the context Christa provided speak to the nature of Rob's motives in this incident described?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						extremely clearly

In your opinion, how seriously should Christa consider this contextual information in deciding whether Rob deserves to be forgiven?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						extremely
seriously						seriously

Extenuating Context Condition Only

In your opinion, how “good” is the context Christa provided in terms of excusing Rob’s behaviour in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all good						excellent

To what extent do you think the context Christa provided truly excuses Rob’s behaviour in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						entirely

To what extent do you think the context Christa provided truly justifies Rob’s behaviour in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						entirely

To what extent would you need more information about the context in which this incident occurred in order to feel justified in forgiving Rob’s behaviour in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I’d need no further information						I would need a great deal more information

Aggravating Context Condition Only

In your opinion, how “good” is the context Christa provided in terms of aggravating Rob’s behaviour in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all good						excellent

To what extent do you think the context Christa provided condemns Rob’s behaviour in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						entirely

To what extent do you think the context Christa provided truly fails to justify Rob’s behaviour in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						entirely

To what extent would you need more information about the context in which this incident occurred in order to feel justified in condemning Rob’s behaviour in this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I’d need no further information						I would need a great deal more information

- ___ 6. I feel confident that there are good reasons why Rob acted the way he did in this instance.
- ___ 7. I would need a great deal of evidence of Rob's good motives before I would feel safe excusing his behaviour in this instance.
- ___ 8. In judging the broader implications of the Rob's behaviour, I'd rather err on the side of giving him the benefit of the doubt than on the side of assuming his intentions to be selfish or inconsiderate.
- ___ 9. I would feel completely comfortable trusting the contextual information Christa provided when drawing conclusions about the Rob's behaviour in their relationship more generally.
- ___ 10. I would need a great deal of evidence of the Rob's bad motives before I would feel safe condemning his behaviour in this instance.
- ___ 11. No amount of evidence could completely justify Rob's behaviour in this event.

instance.

___ 7. I would need a great deal of evidence of Rob's good motives before I would feel safe excusing his behaviour in this instance.

___ 8. In judging the broader implications of the Rob's behaviour, I'd rather err on the side of giving him the benefit of the doubt than on the side of assuming his intentions to be selfish or inconsiderate.

___ 9. I would feel completely comfortable trusting the information Christa provided when drawing conclusions about the Rob's behaviour in their relationship more generally.

___ 10. I would need a great deal of evidence of the Rob's bad motives before I would feel safe condemning his behaviour in this instance.

___ 11. No amount of evidence could completely justify Rob's behaviour in this event.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING ITEMS

1. If it were the only kind of evidence you could obtain, which type of evidence would you prefer? (Check only one)

_____ a) “positive” evidence that Rob’s motives were unselfish or benevolent.

_____ b) “negative evidence that Rob’s motives were selfish or inconsiderate.

My preference for this type of evidence is:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a slight preference			moderate			an extremely strong preference

2. a) As a general rule, I would need a lot of positive evidence to conclude that Rob truly cares about Christa.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strongly disagree						strongly agree

- b) As a general rule, I would need a lot of negative evidence to conclude that Rob does not truly care about Christa.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strongly disagree			neutral			strongly agree

3. Imagine that you had the opportunity to ask Rob any question you liked regarding his behaviour or any aspect of the transgression and that he would have to answer honestly and completely. Think for a moment about what you would like to ask and how you would ask it. Please provide the exact phrasing (as if you were actually asking Rob) of the two questions that you would most like the answers to.

___ 7. Was your behaviour in this situation quite unintentional?

___ 8. Why didn't you consider how your behaviour might impact on Christa in this situation before you acted

RECALL TASK

At this time we would like you to think back to the narrative you read at the very beginning of the study, about Danielle and Stephen.

In the space below (use the back of the page as well, if necessary), please recall everything you can about the narrative you read. We are especially interested in the first details that come to mind. You will have 5 minutes for this task.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please choose the most applicable answer. Some questions may require you to select more than one answer.

1. Your gender M F
2. Your age: _____ years
3. Which of the following groups do you identify with? (choose all that apply)

a) caucasian	e) first nations (indigenous peoples)
b) african american	f) east indian
c) hispanic	g) middle eastern
d) asian	h) other (please specify) _____

4. Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship? no yes

If you answered yes:

- a) how long have you been involved in the relationship? _____ months
- b) your partner's gender is: F M
- c) please indicate which of the following best describe(s) your relationship.
(choose all that apply)

- 1) casual dating
- 2) exclusive dating/quite serious
- 3) exclusive dating/very serious
- 4) engaged
- 5) cohabiting
- 6) married

Appendix D

Recall Coding Sheets

Risk Narrative Coding Checklist

- _____ Danielle
- _____ Stephen
- _____ Relationship length: 14 months
- _____ exclusively dating / quite serious
- _____ broke up several weeks ago
- _____ after going out for just over a year
- _____ had no idea it was going to hurt so much to lose him
- _____ had a good relationship overall
- _____ things just eroded over time / just changed
- _____ don't know if either had control over it
- _____ it just seemed to happen
- _____ wasn't focusing on any negative signs that might have been there.
- _____ Stephen said he didn't want to hurt her
- _____ he had been hesitant to tell her about his doubts about their relationship earlier on.
- _____ he felt like they'd grown apart in the last couple of months
- _____ Danielle ended up hurt anyways
- _____ wished he would have been more open with her when he first had doubts about their compatibility
- _____ he said it was very easy to fall in love with her right from the start
- _____ he said they had some good things going for them in the relationship

- _____ he began to have doubts about how well they suited each other on a deeper, more serious level
- _____ he didn't want to worry her with his doubts until he was more sure about them
- _____ Danielle always thought she'd know if things were changing in their relationship or coming to an end
- _____ Danielle was caught off-guard when he finally told her how he felt
- _____ Danielle had invested a lot in this relationship
- _____ Stephen had invested a lot in this relationship
- _____ thought this was "it", the relationship that would last, the real thing
- _____ wasn't really thinking about what might happen if they broke up
- _____ most dating relationships end at some point or another
- _____ since the break-up Danielle has begun to notice all the ways she depended on Stephen
- _____ maybe you have to break up in order to realize clearly just what it is that you've lost
- _____ a good relationship involves learning to depend on another person
- _____ you can't be close to another person unless you're willing to be a bit vulnerable
- _____ willing to rely on someone else for some of your needs to be met
- _____ this leaves you open to the possibility of being hurt
- _____ she almost wishes now that she'd never fallen in love with Stephen
- _____ it hurts twice as bad now that it's over
- _____ Love's supposed to keep you together not make it worse when things fall apart
- _____ true love is supposed to conquer all

- _____ if you really love someone, things are supposed to work out
- _____ Danielle thinks maybe she was too naïve in believing this
- _____ Danielle thinks its partly her fault for getting so involved
- _____ she should never have let things get to the point where she would end up so hurt
- _____ she knows this kind of pessimistic thinking is 20-20 hindsight, but it doesn't change the way she feels
- _____ a good relationship requires just the right fit between two people
- _____ not just on the surface levels, but deeper down too
- _____ it takes a lot of luck and effort to make things work out
- _____ relationships are kind of fragile things
- _____ she used to think that because she was a good person nothing bad like this break-up would happen
- _____ just being in love isn't a guarantee that you've found the right person for you
- _____ whether you and your partner are truly compatible or not, only kind of gets tested over the longer term
- _____ it's easy to love someone and still be wrong for them
- _____ when half of all relationships end in divorce, what made me think our relationship would last?
- _____ she thought things were okay because they rarely fought and they talked a whole lot
- _____ they never yelled at each other
- _____ love means acknowledging the fact that you're depending on someone else
- _____ it can really hurt when that someone else leaves

- _____ Danielle is feeling pretty vulnerable
- _____ getting involved with someone is risky as hell
- _____ realized just how fragile relationships really are
- _____ how many things can change
- _____ how the chemistry of fitting together is just so damn delicate
- _____ there's so much to lose when you get close to another person
- _____ being in a relationship is a huge investment
- _____ love isn't any promise of security
- _____ maybe we just need to think this way or we'd be too insecure to ever get involved
- _____ Stephen told her he still cares about her as a friend
- _____ she really feels hurt
- _____ she can't help taking this personally
- _____ she doesn't want to be just friends

Control Narrative Coding Checklist

- _____ Danielle
- _____ Stephen
- _____ Relationship length: 14 months
- _____ exclusively dating / quite serious
- _____ met a little more than a year ago
- _____ working for Parks and Rec over the summer
- _____ Danielle had just finished her second year of university
- _____ Stephen had just moved to the city after working out of province for a couple of
years
- _____ in his uncle's business
- _____ in Vancouver
- _____ assigned to the same work crew
- _____ met right away
- _____ on the first day of work in early May
- _____ didn't fall in love at first sight
- _____ took several weeks for things to begin to develop
- _____ neither one of them was looking for a relationship
- _____ Stephen and Danielle's stories about how they met were different
- _____ Stephen thinks Danielle was the first one to express interest
- _____ Danielle doesn't agree
- _____ One of Danielle's best friends was also on their work crew
- _____ Danielle's friend was the one who pointed Stephen out to her one day

_____ while they were laying sod in a new playground area

_____ Danielle's friend thought he was paying more attention to her than he would if his mind was on what he was doing

_____ Danielle more or less ignored what her friend said

_____ when it was time to go back to the shop for lunch, Danielle caught Stephen watching her

_____ Danielle began to wonder if her friend was right after all

_____ Danielle pretty much put the whole thing out of her mind at the time

_____ Danielle and her friend were on a coffee break the next day and she told her what happened

_____ her friend said 'so, give it a shot, the guy's been watching your every move for the past few weeks'

_____ Danielle decided her friend's idea might not be a bad one

_____ Stephen looked at her with a really intriguing smile and then turned away to continue working

_____ at lunch that day back at the shop Danielle sat beside him

_____ and tried to start a conversation

_____ it wasn't the first time they'd sat together over the past several weeks of working together

_____ it didn't take many more days to realize that she liked what she was getting to know about him

_____ they started arranging things so that they could work together when they got the chance

_____ just to talk

_____ one day it was raining so hard that it was impossible for them to work outside

_____ the boss gave them the rest of the day off

_____ Danielle's friend asked her what Stephen was going to do now that they had a half a day free

_____ Danielle was hoping they'd find him somewhere near the door waiting for them on their way out

_____ when they left the building Danielle saw him outside about to climb into his car

_____ he waved to them

_____ he asked them if they had any plans for the afternoon

_____ they said they didn't

_____ they asked him what he was going to do

_____ he said he didn't know

_____ they invited him to spend the afternoon with them

_____ they all went to the mall

_____ they went to a movie

_____ Danielle couldn't actually remember which one

_____ the movie wasn't anything exciting

_____ they stopped for dinner at a roadside place

_____ not far from the mall

_____ the burgers there weren't bad

_____ the milkshakes were pretty good

_____ they talked about a bunch of stuff

- _____ mainly work
- _____ the people they knew there
- _____ some stuff about school as well
- _____ Danielle and her friend told him about the camping trip they went on last summer
- _____ the three of them had a pretty good time
- _____ they weren't out very late
- _____ because they had to be back to work early the next day
- _____ things just sort of progressed, slowly but comfortably if you know what I mean
- _____ Danielle and her friend agree that Stephen had been sending her subtle signals for quite a while