

Is it Possible to Appear Less Lazy? Disclaimer Efficacy in Social Interaction

Natasha N. Riard, PGDip
Monash University

Max Jory, Ph.D
Monash University

This study investigated the effectiveness of a laziness disclaimer in forestalling negative impressions, as well as the underlying mechanisms behind disclaimer backfiring. A sample of 180 primarily Asian participants completed questionnaires that assessed the effects of disclaimer use on laziness perceptions, liking, and general positive impressions, as well as three mechanisms (priming, thought suppression rebound, and confirmation bias) that could explain disclaimer inefficacy. The laziness disclaimer had no significant effects on perceptions of laziness, suggesting that disclaimers may not actually forestall negative retypification. Furthermore, disclaimer use, compared to no disclaimer use, had significant negative effects on liking and other positive impressions when it preceded a subsequent lazy statement. Confirmation bias most strongly explained why disclaimers do not work. The results of this study suggest that disclaimers do not fulfill their intended purpose of preventing negative perceptions because they provide trait information that enables individuals to make shortcuts to impression-formation.

Keywords: disclaimers, qualifiers, confirmation bias, impression formation, attribution style, Singapore, Asia

Sharing dissenting opinions is difficult for most people. Compared to the rewards of making a good point or being authentic, the risk of being negatively evaluated is high. One way this discomfort is eased is through the use of disclaimers. This simple device allows a contrary or unpopular statement to be expressed in an acceptable manner, and prevents others from perceiving the statement negatively—or so we assume. But does preceding a lazy statement with the phrase “I don’t mean to sound lazy...” actually decrease the likelihood of making a specific negative impression of appearing lazy?

A disclaimer is “a verbal device employed to ward off and defeat in advance doubts and negative typifications which may result from intended conduct” (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975, p.3). In other words, when people are faced with social situations in which they are about to mention a negative or contrasting opinion, they may use a disclaimer before voicing their viewpoint in order to avoid the predicted negative judgment. The goal of using a disclaimer is to dissociate one’s identity from an assumed negative judgment that may occur from

one’s words or actions (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975). Within sociology, disclaimers are considered a form of alignment talk, which has the fundamental goal of maintaining social interaction (Overstreet & Yule, 2001).

Disclaimers, therefore, are used to mitigate anticipated negative evaluations in order to sustain an ongoing conversation. Hewitt and Stokes (1975) identified five types of disclaimers: hedging, credentialing, sin licenses, cognitive disclaimers, and appeals of the suspension of judgment. Whereas a distinction between types of disclaimers is conceptually interesting, it is important to note that all disclaimers have similar attributes. They are mostly concerned with issues regarding “right thinking” and “proper social conduct,” (McLaughlin, 1984, p. 206), as well as upholding a positive self-image.

Researchers who have examined spoken interactions have found that speakers and listeners alike appeared highly familiar with disclaimers (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006; Galasiska & Galasiski, 2003; Overstreet & Yule, 2001; Strauss, 2004; van Dijk, 1992). Overstreet and Yule (2001) examined transcripts of dialogues and observed that speakers showed an ability to anticipate that their speech may cause their listeners to judge them negatively, and subsequently employed disclaimers to avoid negative judgment. Disclaimers were used to mitigate simple problematic actions, such as the possibility of

Author’s Note:

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to natasha.riard@gmail.com. The author is deeply grateful to Dr. Max Jory, Prof. Robert Morgan, William Somerville, Nadia Singh, Faridah Abdullah, Renee Lee, and Roshan Rai for their guidance, support, and much needed brilliance in the conception and finalization of this work.

being judged as selfish (Overstreet & Yule), as well as serious actions, such as being typified as a racist (Galasiska & Galasiski). Listeners were also able to manipulate its formula, “not X or anything, but Y” (Overstreet & Yule, 2001, p. 45), by truncating or co-constructing it as they saw fit during conversation. For instance, in one of the dialogues examined by Overstreet and Yule, a listener helped the speaker co-construct a disclaimer by completing certain parts of it (italics represent the listener’s input): “I’m sure he’s not... *peeping* or anything... *but he... but... you accidentally saw him.*”

These findings show that people do use disclaimers to say what they want without fear of negative judgment. In fact, assessments of racist discourse showed that people could comfortably share controversial opinions with the help of disclaimers (Condor et al., 2006; Galasiska & Galasiski). For example, by pre-empting his opinion on Gypsies with “I’m not a racist, but...” (Galasiska & Galasiski, p. 853), a Hungarian man was able to say, “They steal, they are rowdy...” without fear of being called a racist. But are disclaimers really effective in preventing negative judgment? Although they are widely used, not much is actually known about their efficacy.

A disclaimer’s effectiveness can be judged using two simple criteria. If a listener (a) accepts a user’s opinion, and (b) makes no undesired retypification of the speaker, a disclaimer can be considered fully successful (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975). When a claim is rejected but no negative retypification is made, it is considered a partial success. The handful of studies done on disclaimers does not provide a concrete answer as to whether disclaimers effectively meet Hewitt & Stokes’ (1975) criteria. Most have focused on the first condition (i.e., acceptance of a user’s opinion) rather than evidence of undesired retypification (e.g., Condor et al., 2006; Galasiska & Galasiski, 2003; Strauss, 2004;). In two studies that did partially address the second condition, Tsui (1994), and Overstreet and Yule (2001) found that listeners sometimes provided immediate verbal agreement, or “supportive feedback” (Overstreet & Yule, 2001, p. 52), to users of disclaimers. For example, as a speaker verbalizes “...it’s not that I’m boasting or anything but I...” her listener interrupts with the supportive feedback “You’re not,” (Tsui, 1994, p. 151), as if to say, “No, you’re not boasting.”

Although both studies contend that the disclaimers were successful since no negative retypification was made, this assumption may not necessarily be true. While the receiver of the disclaimer did not outwardly construe the user as boastful or proud, there was no real evidence to suggest that their replies were genuine. An alternative explanation, therefore, is that negative retypifications were made but not revealed. Two other aspects of these studies make it difficult to draw conclusions from them about disclaimer effectiveness. First, out of the 10 dialogues shared by Overstreet and Yule (2001), only two showed the possibility of disclaimer effectiveness (i.e., when the receiver of the disclaimer replied with supportive feedback); the others merely showed usage (i.e., a disclaimer was used but no supportive feedback was given). Second, neither study (Overstreet & Yule; Tsui, 1994) employed an experimental approach. Instead, transcripts were observed for the use of disclaimers but no attempts were made to find out if the listener made judgments of the speaker. Assumptions about disclaimer efficacy were based entirely on observation and linguistic analysis of the transcripts.

Other studies have found that disclaimers may not necessarily achieve what people intend them to do (Bell, Zahn, & Hopper, 1984; Bradley, 1981; El-Alayli, Myers, Petersen, & Lystad, 2008). Bradley (1981) and El-Alayli et al. (2008) found that, rather than prevent unwanted typification, disclaimers actually cause its users to be perceived negatively. On the other hand, Bell et al. (1984) discovered that disclaimers had no effect on perceptions at all. In fact, those authors attribute Bradley’s results to a “hammer effect.” They believe her participants may have been exposed to an “unnaturally high number of powerless speech forms,” (p. 34) resulting in the negative effects of disclaimer use. Furthermore, it is difficult to establish the true effects of disclaimer use in Bradley’s study because they were grouped with other linguistic features such as tag questions (i.e., an interrogative phrase that turns a statement into a question, e.g., “You will do this, *won’t you?*”).

In their research, Bell et al. (1984) used hedge and cognitive disclaimers to test differences between disclaimer use and non-disclaimer use. They found that disclaimers significantly affected judgments of competence and certainty but only when four or six disclaimers were used. The use of a single disclaimer, or a com-

bination of two disclaimers (hedge and cognitive), had no significant effects on perceptions of competence, character, dynamism, certainty, or how in or out of touch someone was with reality. Thus, it appears that using a single disclaimer appears to be just as “effective” as not using one.

Whereas Bell et al. (1984) and Bradley (1980) tested the effects of disclaimer use on general judgments, El-Alayli et al. (2008) argue that the function of disclaimers is to forestall a specific judgment based on the disclaimed trait. For example, if a person uses the disclaimer “I’m not arrogant, but...” they are presumably trying to ward off the unwanted characterization of being arrogant. Consequently, El-Alayli et al. (2008) focused their efforts on determining if a specific disclaimer was able to ward off the specific disclaimed trait. They examined the use of an arrogance disclaimer (“I don’t mean to sound arrogant, but...”) and found that using this disclaimer significantly increased judgments of the speaker’s arrogance, but only when an arrogant statement ensued. Moreover, disclaimer use had significant negative effects on degree of liking (i.e., participants liked the student less when a disclaimer was used), as well as perceptions of modesty. They also found similar results using a laziness and selfishness disclaimer. However, compared to the participants in the arrogance study who found the student less likeable when an arrogance disclaimer was used, the participants in the laziness study did not differ in their degree of liking whether a laziness disclaimer was used or not. This suggests that degree of liking may be more influenced by trait-type rather than disclaimer use because some traits are judged more harshly than others. The participants may have found it easier to like the lazy student than the arrogant one because laziness may have appeared more acceptable to them than arrogance.

El-Alayli et al. also examined the use of an “admittance” disclaimer, which is a disclaimer that acknowledges the negative trait (e.g., “I know this may sound selfish, but...”). They found that the speaker was rated as significantly less selfish when no disclaimer was used compared to when either of the disclaimers was used. Furthermore, having someone use a disclaimer on another’s behalf proved significantly more effective than a self-imposed disclaimer. Overall, their findings suggest that, despite their widespread use, individuals are better off not using disclaimers.

Why might disclaimers fail to achieve their intended effect? El-Alayli et al. (2008) examined the social psychological theories of priming, thought suppression rebound, and confirmation bias for answers to this question. Priming activates schemas and facilitates the trait judgments a person makes (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Stapel & Koomen, 2000; Stapel, Koomen, & van der Pligt 1997). Therefore a trait word mentioned in a disclaimer (e.g., arrogant) might activate a network of relevant information aiding judgments about arrogance while simultaneously inhibiting access to alternative characteristics. In thought suppression rebound, attempts to not think about something (e.g., white bears, sex, depressing events) can cause a rebound effect to occur, which may cause a person’s mind to later be inundated with that thought (e.g., Isbell, Smith, & Wyer, 1998; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994; Wegner, Schneider, Carter, & White, 1987; Wegner, Schneider, Knutson, & McMahon, 1991; Wegner, Shortt, Blake, & Page, 1990). Therefore, disclaimers may draw people’s attention to the disclaimed trait, and cause them to try and suppress judgment only to be flooded with the disclaimed thought later (El-Alayli et al., 2008). Finally, confirmation bias is characterized by seeking out information that confirms a hypothesis while ignoring other details that may disconfirm it (e.g., Hill, Memon, & McGeorge, 2008; Brewer, 1988; von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995). Consequently, disclaimer use may prompt others to expect a negative comment to follow. They might then pay close attention to any information that would confirm their expectations while ignoring information that does not (El-Alayli et al., 2008).

El-Alayli et al. (2008) found that, of the three theories described above, confirmation bias was the strongest explanation for the disclaimer effect. However, the authors presented participants with only one piece of trait information about the user: selfishness. This did not enable participants to seek, from a number of other possible traits, examples of selfish behaviour in order to confirm their own opinion of the speaker. This finding is therefore poor support of confirmation bias. Another methodological issue in this study was that mechanism conditions (i.e., confirmation bias, thought suppression, trait priming) could not be compared directly against each other. Because the mechanisms operate differently, they have different dependent variables. In three sepa-

rate analyses, the confirmation bias mechanism was the only one to produce a significant result. El-Alayli et al. (2008) therefore considered it the best explanation for disclaimers backfiring. To their credit, however, there seems no other possible method to compare the mechanisms with each other as they operate differently and thus have disparate dependent variables.

The aim of the present study was to replicate and extend El-Alayli et al.'s (2008) study by integrating selected aspects from the experiments described in their paper. A major difference between this study and El-Alayli et al.'s (2008) is the population sampled. Participants in El-Alayli et al.'s (2008) study were from Eastern Washington University, which is assumed to have a predominantly American (i.e., White) population whereas this study used students from the National University of Singapore (NUS), which has a predominantly Asian (typically Singaporean) population. While the difference in population sampled may limit the ability to compare this study's results with El-Alayli et al.'s (2008), it would be interesting to find out if cultural differences impact on how information provided in disclaimers are perceived and used to make value judgments. The most popularly researched cross-cultural difference is the individualism-collectivism dimension. Studies have shown that Westerners are more individualistic whereas Easterners are more collectivistic (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Smith & Bond, 1998). More specifically, Hofstede (1980) found that Singaporeans ranked high on power distance for work-related values, which means that they were more likely not to express disagreement. Furthermore, Oyserman et al.'s (2002) meta-analyses on studies that looked at attribution styles of people in Eastern and Western countries found that Asians were more likely to attribute deviant behaviour to situational circumstances whereas Americans were more likely to make dispositional attributions and ignore contextual influences. As a result, Asians may look at the whole picture, including disclaimer information, before overtly judging a person whereas Americans may hear a disclaimer and use it to judge the user's character in spite of situational circumstances.

This study used a scenario similar to the one used by El-Alayli et al. (2008) in their second experiment. This involved participants imagining that they were

talking with university students about daily life in college. The primary objective was to assess disclaimer effectiveness, in particular the laziness disclaimer. Based on El-Alayli et al.'s (2008) findings, it was predicted that the use of a disclaimer would make the speaker seem more lazy in the lazy-statement condition but not in the non-lazy statement condition. Given the discrepancy among findings regarding disclaimer effects on general perceptions, the study explored the effects of disclaimer use on degree of liking, as well as ratings of general positive qualities. Finally, the study assessed whether the confirmation bias mechanism, compared to trait priming and thought suppression rebound, better explains disclaimer backfiring. It was predicted that confirmation bias compared to priming and thought suppression would most strongly account for disclaimer backfiring if a significant effect is found for the relationship between laziness expectancies and laziness ratings, but not for normal versus admittance disclaimers, or the difference between completed laziness-related words in the disclaimer condition and the no disclaimer condition.

Method

Participants

Students ($N = 147$) were approached at various locations on the National University of Singapore (NUS) campus and asked to complete a questionnaire voluntarily. A convenience sample ($N = 33$) of the researcher's family and friends was also used; this group completed the questionnaire online. All participants, including the online sample, were randomly assigned to one of six conditions, with 30 participants per condition. Participants were assigned to either a lazy or non-lazy statement condition, where a normal disclaimer, admittance disclaimer, or no disclaimer was used. The sample comprised 98 females and 82 males (M age = 24.46, $SD = 7.02$) of Asian (98%) and European (2%) descent between the ages of 19 to 59. There were 138 Singaporeans, 21 Chinese, 5 Malaysians, 4 Indians, 3 Indonesians, 2 Filipinos, 1 Hong Konger, 1 Japanese, 1 Korean, 1 Thai, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Hungarian, and 1 French.

Design

A two (lazy or non-lazy statement) by two (disclaimer or no disclaimer) between-subjects factorial design was used to assess disclaimer efficacy. The

study used El-Alayli et al.'s methods to test disclaimer backfiring: (a) a word association task assessed trait priming; (b) a two (lazy or non-lazy statement) by two (normal disclaimer or admittance disclaimer) assessed thought suppression rebound; and (c) the relationship between participants' expectations and their subsequent impressions tested for confirmation bias. To test the confirmation bias mechanism more effectively, however, more trait information regarding the speaker was made available to the participants. Moreover, considering that the mechanism conditions cannot, as yet, be compared directly against each other, a comparison of their individual effect sizes would be made if more than one mechanism produces significant results. The dependent variables for the effects of disclaimer use were ratings of laziness, degree of liking, and general positive qualities.

Materials

A three-page questionnaire similar to El-Alayli et al.'s (2008) was constructed for use in this study. In all conditions, participants first read a scenario that involved imagining they were talking with some students about daily life in university. Each person in the scenario gets a chance to say a little about him or herself before speaking about class attendance. Participants were instructed to complete the questionnaire in order and not skip or turn to the next page without first completing the answers on the current page. Participants read the following:

“Hi, it’s my second year here. I still haven’t decided on a major yet. Right now I’m taking four modules. They’re alright but sometimes they can be boring. I do a number of things in my spare time. I enjoy hanging out with friends or spending quality time with myself.”

This scenario was followed by the sentence stem “Every once in a while...” or “On most days...” (no disclaimer condition), “I don’t mean to sound lazy but...” (disclaimer condition), or “I know this sounds lazy but...” (admittance disclaimer condition). A comparison of laziness ratings between the admittance disclaimer and the normal disclaimer assessed the thought suppression rebound mechanism. El-Alayli et al. (2008) reasoned that using an admittance disclaimer acknowl-

edges rather than disclaims the laziness of following opinions. Since listeners are not asked to suppress their negative judgments, they should not overly rate the laziness of the speaker. If the admittance disclaimer produces lower estimates of laziness than the normal disclaimer, then the thought suppression rebound mechanism would be the likely mechanism operating rather than confirmation bias or trait priming.

After reading the scenario and sentence stem, participants rated how much they expected the student to continue by saying something [e.g., lazy]. They rated expectancies for seven laziness-related traits (motivated, inactive, lazy, sluggish, ambitious, responsible, energetic) intermixed with 12 filler characteristics (e.g. happy, shy, dishonest) that included general positive traits (e.g. confident, helpful, polite) on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely). Each participant’s ratings on the laziness-related traits were averaged to determine an overall laziness expectancy score. These expectancies were then used to assess the confirmation bias mechanism. If participants’ expectations of laziness in the speaker influenced their subsequent ratings of laziness in the speaker, then expectations of laziness should form a significant covariate, signalling a relationship between expectations of laziness and ratings of laziness. If this occurs, then the confirmation bias mechanism may explain why disclaimers backfire.

On the second page of the questionnaire, participants read the full sentence stem that contained either a lazy or non-lazy statement. In the lazy statement condition, the student said, “On most days, getting out of bed to go to class is way more hassle than I’m willing to go through.” In the non-lazy statement condition, participants read, “Every once in a while I have a little trouble getting out of bed in the morning to go to class.” Next, participants rated, on the same 19 traits, the extent to which they thought each trait was characteristic of the student. Each participant’s ratings on the laziness-related traits, and general positive traits, were averaged to determine an overall laziness, and general positive qualities, score. Participants also rated on a scale from one (not at all) to seven (completely), how much they thought they would like the student in the scenario.

On the third and final page, participants performed a word completion task that assessed laziness trait priming. They filled in the missing letter in each of eight words that could either be completed with a lazy-

related word or other words (e.g., slo_, _loth, la_y). Some words had been provided in El-Alayli et al.'s study while the rest were chosen by the researcher. Participants were instructed to complete each word as fast they could with the first word that came to mind, and to leave the word blank if they were unable to complete it. Doing so would prevent participants from going through the alphabet list letter by letter in order to complete the word, which would defeat the purpose of the task.

Procedure

This study received ethics approval by the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research involving Humans (SCERH) (Project no.: 2008001581) prior to participant recruitment. The researcher administered materials from all six conditions to participants on the NUS campus. Participants first read an explanatory statement informing them of the aim of the study (i.e., to gain a better understanding of how different amounts of information are able to influence person perception), what the study required them to do (i.e., complete a questionnaire), and that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained as no identification was required. Participants were randomly assigned to each condition, and received a questionnaire with an envelope to place the completed questionnaire in to ensure anonymity. Participants indicated their age, gender, and nationality before starting the questionnaire. All participants were instructed to complete the answers on the questionnaire in order and not to skip or turn to the next page without having answered the questions on the current page. The convenience sample completed the exact same questionnaire online, depending on the condition to which they were randomly assigned.

Results

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine whether there were any distinctions (i.e., laziness traits, and general positive qualities traits) among the 19 traits used (e.g., lazy, motivated, happy, anxious). Prior to performing factor analysis, the suitability of the data were assessed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was .83, exceeding the recommended value of .60 and Barlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance ($p < .01$), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. All factor analyses presented were done using Varimax rotation because of the simplicity of its interpretation; each original variable tends to load to only one factor and each factor usually represents a small number of variables. All 19 variables had factor loadings of .50 or higher, and all loaded highly on only one factor. The factor analysis revealed four factors; laziness (inactive, lazy, sluggish), positive qualities (competent, ambitious, confident, intelligent, motivated, energetic, responsible, helpful), negative qualities (sad, anxious, hostile, dishonest, shy), and likeable qualities (polite, friendly, happy).

Laziness Perceptions

The factor analysis performed on the 19 traits rated by the 120 participants involved in the analysis (statement by disclaimer; the other 60 participants were part of the thought suppression rebound design) revealed a laziness factor (Eigenvalue = 2.83), consisting of inactive, lazy, and sluggish (factor loadings = .75 to .90). Participants' scores for the three traits were averaged to form a laziness index. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the laziness index score for the four conditions. The speaker was rated slightly lower

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Laziness Index Score by Disclaimer Condition and Statement Type

Statement Type	Disclaimer		No Disclaimer	
	M	SD	M	SD
Non-lazy Statement	4.0	1.73	4.17	1.46
Lazy Statement	4.27	1.73	4.71	1.33

$n = 120$

DISCLAIMER EFFICACY IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Degree of Liking by Disclaimer Condition and Statement Type

Statement Type	Disclaimer		No Disclaimer	
	M	SD	M	SD
Non-lazy Statement	3.70	1.39	3.67	1.02
Lazy Statement	3.23	1.17	3.9	1.19

n = 120

on laziness ratings when a disclaimer, compared to no disclaimer, preceded a lazy statement. A two (lazy/non-lazy statement) by two (disclaimer/no disclaimer) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) performed on the laziness index (dependent variable) revealed no significant main effects for both statement laziness, $F(1, 116) = 1.99, p = .16$, and disclaimer/no disclaimer use, $F(1, 116) = 1.13, p = .29$, as well as no interaction, $F(1, 116) = .24, p = .63$. There were no significant differences in participants' ratings of laziness when a lazy or non-lazy statement was made, or when a disclaimer was used or not.

General Perceptions

Liking. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of degree of liking for the statement by disclaimer conditions. Participants liked the speaker less when a disclaimer was used, compared to when it was not, but only when a lazy statement followed. A statement by disclaimer ANOVA showed no significant main effects for statement laziness, $F(1, 116) = .28, p = .60$, or disclaimer/no disclaimer use, $F(1, 116) = 2.09,$

$p = .15$. There was also no significant interaction, $F(1, 116) = 2.55, p = .11$. An independent samples *t* test was also performed to specifically compare laziness ratings between disclaimer and no disclaimer use for the lazy statement condition. This comparison follows logically as it would be expected that the disclaimer effect would occur in the presence, rather than absence, of a subsequent lazy statement. The mean liking score was significantly lower when a disclaimer, rather than no disclaimer, was used, ($t(58) = -2.19, p = .03$).

Positive Qualities. In addition to the laziness factor used to test the confirmation bias hypothesis, the factor analysis also yielded a positive qualities factor (Eigenvalue = 5.99), consisting of motivated, ambitious, responsible, energetic, intelligent, competent, confident, and helpful traits (factor loadings = .54 to .77). These traits were averaged to form a positive qualities index. Table 3 provides the means and standard deviations of the positive qualities index score for each of the four conditions. Participants had lower impressions of positive qualities in the speaker when a disclaimer preceded

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Positive Qualities Index Score by Disclaimer Condition and Statement Type

Statement Type	Disclaimer		No Disclaimer	
	M	SD	M	SD
Non-lazy Statement	3.23	.99	3.25	.94
Lazy Statement	2.97	1.24	3.68	1.05

n = 120

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Number of Laziness-related Word Completions by Condition

Statement Type	Disclaimer		No Disclaimer	
	M	SD	M	SD
Non-lazy Statement	4.90	1.85	5.03	1.54
Lazy Statement	5.10	1.73	4.90	2.19

 $n = 120$

Table 5

Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of Speaker Laziness by Disclaimer Type and Laziness Statement Content

Statement Type	Normal Disclaimer		Admittance Disclaimer	
	M	SD	M	SD
Non-lazy Statement	4.0	1.73	4.79	1.26
Lazy Statement	4.27	1.73	5.21	1.65

 $n = 120$

a lazy statement. A statement by disclaimer ANOVA performed on the positive qualities index revealed no significant main effects for statement laziness, $F(1, 116) = .20, p = .65$, or disclaimer/no disclaimer use, $F(1, 116) = 3.49, p = .06$, and no significant interaction, $F(1, 116) = 3.10, p = .08$. However, an independent samples t test between the disclaimer and no disclaimer conditions with the lazy statement showed that disclaimer use resulted in a significantly lower rating of positive qualities compared to no disclaimer use, ($t(58) = -2.37, p = .02$).

Tests of Underlying Mechanisms

Priming. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for the number of laziness-related word completions among the four main conditions. Participants completed approximately the same number of laziness-related words among four conditions. A statement by disclaimer ANOVA performed on the number of laziness-related word completions resulted in no sig-

nificant main effect for statement laziness, $F(1, 116) = .01, p = .92$, or disclaimer/no disclaimer use, $F(1, 116) = .01, p = .92$, as well as no significant interaction, $F(1, 116) = .25, p = .62$.

Thought suppression rebound. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations of laziness ratings for an admittance and normal disclaimer. The use of an admittance disclaimer resulted in higher laziness scores regardless of whether a lazy or non-lazy statement was made. A statement by disclaimer ANOVA showed a significant main effect of disclaimer, $F(1, 116) = 8.85, p = .004$. The partial eta squared statistic (.07) indicated a moderate effect size (Cohen, 1988). There was no significant main effect of statement, $F(1, 116) = 1.34, p = .25$, or interaction, $F(1, 116) = .06, p = .80$.

Confirmation bias. A factor analysis performed on all traits (KMO value = .83) revealed a laziness expectation factor (inactive, sluggish, lazy) with factor loadings from .74 to .84 (Eigenvalue = 2.02, $M = 3.59, SD = 1.36$). Table 6 shows the estimated marginal means

DISCLAIMER EFFICACY IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

Table 6

Estimated Marginal Means and Standard Errors of Laziness Index Scores by Disclaimer Condition

Statement Type	Disclaimer		No Disclaimer	
	M	SE	M	SE
Non-lazy Statement	3.95	.26	4.26	.26
Lazy Statement	4.27	.26	4.68	.26

$n = 120$

and standard errors of laziness ratings for the statement by disclaimer conditions with laziness expectations as a covariate. Laziness ratings were only slightly higher when no disclaimer was used, for both statement conditions. A statement by disclaimer Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was performed, using expectations of laziness as a covariate, on ratings of laziness. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measure of the covariate. There were no significant main effects for either statement laziness, $F(1, 115) = 2.0, p = .16$, or disclaimer/no disclaimer use, $F(1, 115) = 1.92, p = .17$. There was also no significant interaction, $F(1, 116) = .04, p = .85$. The covariate, however, was significant, $F(1, 115) = 25.04, p < .01$ with a large effect size (partial eta squared = .18); therefore, participants' expectations of speaker laziness following the disclaimer but prior to the lazy/non-lazy statement had a large influence on their subsequent ratings of speaker laziness. The positive correlation between laziness expectancy and laziness impressions was also significant, $r = .48, n = 120, p < .01$; as participants' initial laziness expectancies increased, so too did their ratings of laziness in the speaker following either statement type.

Discussion

This study investigated the effects of laziness disclaimers on perceptions of laziness, as well as general impressions and the possible reasons for disclaimer backfiring. The hypothesis that a laziness disclaimer would increase perceptions of speaker laziness when

followed by a lazy statement was not supported. Rather, participants rated the speaker no differently whether a disclaimer was used or not, and whether a lazy or non-lazy statement ensued. Although these results do not support El-Alayli et al.'s (2008) finding that disclaimers increased judgments of laziness when a lazy statement followed, these results do provide support for the claim that disclaimers do not work as we intend them to. Rather than forestall negative judgment, disclaimers in this study had no effect on laziness impressions, suggesting that using a disclaimer is just as "useful" as not using one (Bell et al., 1984).

Aside from failing to prevent the specific judgment of laziness, disclaimer use in this study also caused negative general perceptions. Disclaimer use caused participants to give significantly lower ratings to the speaker's likability and other positive traits (i.e., motivated, ambitious, responsible, energetic, intelligent, competent, confident, and helpful). This finding suggests that disclaimers are not only ineffective, they appear to do more harm than good. Similarly, El-Alayli et al. (2008) found that the use of an arrogance disclaimer, compared to no disclaimer use, negatively affected degree of liking when an arrogant statement ensued.

Contrary to these results, the use of selfishness and laziness disclaimers in the El-Alayli (2008) study did not affect degree of liking or general positive impressions. Bell et al. (1984) also reported no effects on traits (e.g., competence, credibility) unrelated to the disclaimed trait. The reason for the inconsistency between the findings of this study and previous research may stem from cultural differences in perceptions of traits rather than disclaimer use; that is, different cultures may have different levels of tolerance for differ-

ent traits. Broadly speaking, Asians are interdependent; they are cooperative, responsible for their actions and the actions of the collective, and devote their efforts to benefitting the collective (Fiske et al., 1998). As such, laziness may be viewed negatively because it is a trait that is not congruent with the objectives of the collective and thus makes the person less likeable.

In investigating why the disclaimers did not work, confirmation bias, rather than priming or thought suppression rebound, was the best-supported explanation. Participants' expectations of laziness in the speaker (i.e., prior to the lazy or non-lazy statement but after the disclaimer was mentioned) had a significant impact on their subsequent ratings of speaker laziness. This suggests that the disclaimer may have influenced participants' opinions by prompting them to expect a lazy comment to follow and consequently pay close attention to any information that confirmed their expectations while ignoring information that did not. As such, disclaimers function in a manner similar to stereotypes in that they provide people with a shortcut to impression-formation. Stereotypes that people have about members of stereotyped groups (Brewer, 1988; von Hippel et al., 1995), or information they have prior to knowing someone (e.g., information that a suspect is guilty) (Hill et al., 2008), can influence the expectations and subsequent judgments they make of that group or individual. Similarly, disclaimers may provide individuals with trait information so that they can make quick and effortless trait judgments.

It could be argued, however, that since the overall outcome of the covariate analysis did not result in a significant difference between laziness perceptions whether a disclaimer was used or not, confirmation bias might not actually be the operative mechanism. If confirmation bias is the basis for disclaimer backfiring, then ratings of laziness should have been significantly lower when no disclaimer was used, as participants were not provided with a trait alert. This was not the case in the current study. A potential explanation is that disclaimers may simply serve to justify, rather than influence, the listener's ratings of the speaker's disclaimed trait (i.e., laziness). Meaning, disclaimer use may simply strengthen the confidence of the rating rather than magnify or reduce it.

Interestingly, an examination of the thought suppression rebound findings showed that the admittance

disclaimer generated significantly higher ratings of speaker laziness than a normal disclaimer. This outcome could be the result of different cognitive interpretations made by listeners based on the phrasing of the disclaimer. The normal disclaimer "I don't mean to sound lazy..." could have been interpreted as an apology for the possible lazy comment that followed whereas the admittance disclaimer "I know this sounds lazy..." may have backfired, as Hewitt and Stokes (1978) suggested, because it prompts the listener into thinking "If you know it's [lazy], why are you saying it?" (p. 8).

A possible limitation that could explain why disclaimers had no negative effects on laziness impressions in this study is the lack of clear differentiation between the lazy and non-lazy statement conditions. No main effect was found for statement type on laziness ratings, which indicates that participants did not judge the lazy statement to be any different from the non-lazy one in terms of the specific attribute of lazy. This finding was unexpected because the present study used the same lazy and non-lazy statements as El-Alayli et al. (2008), who did find a significant main effect of statement type. The present study did, however, include in the scenario extra trait descriptors about the speaker such as "I do a number of things in my spare time," which may have led participants to deliberate further before rating the speaker as lazy in spite of the lazy statement made. This is in line with Oyserman et al.'s (2002) meta-analyses, which showed that Asians were more likely than Americans to take into account contextual information before making dispositional attributions about deviant behaviour. For example, participants could have thought that the speaker was lazy only in terms of the specific behaviour described (e.g., waking up for school) but not in other ways, which could have prompted them to rate him as similarly as they would have if he had made a non-lazy statement. The trait descriptors were included in the scenario to ensure that confirmation bias was effectively tested. As previously outlined, confirmation bias theory holds that individuals tend to seek out information to confirm their own opinion while ignoring other relevant details that can disconfirm their opinion. Thus more trait attributes of the speaker were provided so that participants could seek, from a number of other possible traits, examples of laziness behaviour in order to confirm their own opinion of the speaker.

Future research should focus on the impact of dif-

ferent disclaimer types, such as those identified by Hewitt and Stokes (1978) (e.g., cognitive, hedge, admittance, sin licenses) on subsequent impressions. As this study showed, one type of disclaimer can result in a negative retypification while another type does not. It would be interesting, for example, to assess whether an attitude disclaimer, "I'm not a racist, but..." (see Galasiski & Galasiska, 2003, p. 853), can prevent one from being typified as a racist in spite of any undesirable comments made. Future research could also investigate other methods for establishing possible underlying mechanisms for disclaimer backfiring than those used in this study. While the word completion task was suitable for this study as words that could be completed using laziness-related words or not (lazy vs. lady) were easily found, it might not be the same for other trait-related words (selfish, arrogant, etc). Future research may want to examine as well, whether familiarity with the speaker, or how likeable the speaker is, has any impact on disclaimer efficacy. Other variables that may also impact disclaimer efficacy include non-verbal (e.g., facial expression) and verbal factors (e.g., tone of voice), as well as familiarity with the speaker.

Conclusion

This study found that a laziness disclaimer does not prevent the specific negative judgment of laziness; the speaker was regarded just as lazy whether a disclaimer was used or not when a lazy statement was made. Furthermore, disclaimers backfired by negatively affecting perceptions of positive qualities and degree of liking. Confirmation bias was deemed the most likely mechanism in explaining disclaimer backfiring. The real-world application of disclaimers has implications for both public figures whose opinions affect huge populations, and for people during their everyday communications with friends, family, and colleagues. Politicians who have to announce unpopular policies and businessmen who have to make undesirable offers both stand to benefit from knowing whether the disclaimers they use have any effect.

People use disclaimers assuming that they will help them avoid negative judgment. The surprising finding of this study is that disclaimers do not actually fulfill their intended role, and may even have adverse effects on social interaction. I don't mean to get on my high horse, but information about disclaimer efficacy may

influence peoples' decisions about when, and what type of disclaimers they should use, or if they should use them at all.

References

- Bell, R. A., Zahn, C. J., & Hopper, R. (1984). Disclaiming: A test of two competing views. *Communication Quarterly*, 32, 28-36.
- Bradley, P. H. (1981). The folk-linguistics of women's speech: An empirical examination. *Communication Monographs*, 48, 73-90. doi:10.1080/03637758109376048
- Brewer, M. B. (1988). A dual process of impression formation. In T. Srull & R. Wyer (Eds.), *Advances in social cognition* (Vol. 1). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Cohen, J. W. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Condor, L., Figgou, S., Abell, J., Gibson, S., & Stevenson, S. (2006). 'They're not racist...' Prejudice denial, mitigation and suppression in dialogue. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 45, 441-462. doi:10.1348/014466605X66817
- El-Alayli, A., Myers, C. J., Pertersen, T. L., & Lystad, A. L. (2008). "I don't mean to sound arrogant, but..." The effects of using disclaimers on person perception. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34, 130-143. doi:10.1177/0146167207309200
- Fiske, A. P., Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., & Nisbett, R. E. (1998). The cultural matrix of social psychology. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 2, pp. 915-981). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fiske, S. T., & Neuberg, S. L. (1990). A continuum of impression formation, from category-based to individuating processes: Influences of information and motivation on attention and interpretation. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 23, pp. 1-74). San Diego, CA: Academic Press
- Galasiska, A., & Galasiski, D. (2003). Discursive strategies for coping with sensitive topics of the other. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 29, 849-863. doi:10.1080/1369183032000149604
- Hewitt, J. P., & Stokes, R. (1975). Disclaimers as aligning actions preserving situational definitions in the face of disruptive lines of conduct. *American Sociological Review*, 40, 1-11. doi:10.2307/2094442
- Hill, C., Memon, A., & McGeorge, P. (2008). The role of confirmation bias in suspect interviews: A systematic evaluation. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 13, 357-371. doi:10.1348/135532507X238682
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Isbell, L. M., Smith, H. L., & Wyer, R. S. Jr. (1998). Consequences of attempts to disregard social information. In J.M. Golding & C.M. Macleod, *International forgetting: Interdisciplinary approaches* (pp.289-320). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Macrae, C. N., Bodenhausen, G. V., Milne, A. B., & Jetten, J. (1994). Out of mind but back in sight: Stereotypes on the re-

- bound. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 808-817. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.67.5.808
- McLaughlin, M. (1984). *Conversation: How talk is organized*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Overstreet, M., & Yule, G. (2001). Formulaic disclaimers. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33, 45-60. doi:10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00125-3
- Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 3-72. doi: 10.1037//0033-2909.128.1.3
- Smith, P. B., & Bond, M. H. (1998). *Social psychology across cultures* (2nd ed.). London: Prentice Hall Europe.
- Stapel, D. A., & Koomen, W. (2000). The impact of opposites: Implications of trait preferences and their antonyms for person judgment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 36, 439-464. doi:10.1006/jesp.1999.1410
- Stapel, D. A., Koomen, W., & van der Pligt, J. (1997). Categories of category accessibility: The impact of trait concept versus exemplar priming on person judgments. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 33, 47-76. doi:10.1006/jesp.1996.1311
- Strauss, C. (2004). Cultural standing in expression of opinion. *Language in Society*, 33, 161-194. doi:10.1017/S004740450433201X
- Tsui, A. (1994). *English conversation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse & Society*, 3, 87-118. doi:10.1177/0957926592003001005
- von Hippel, W., Setaquaptewa, D., & Vargas, P. (1995). On the role of encoding processes in stereotype maintenance. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 27, pp. 177-254). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Wegner, D. M., Schneider, D. J., Carter, S. R., & White, T. L. (1987). Paradoxical effects of thought suppression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 5-13. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.53.1.5
- Wegner, D. M., Schneider, D. J., Knutson, B., & McMahon, S. R. (1991). Polluting the stream of consciousness: The effect of thought suppression on the mind's environment. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 15, 141-152. doi:10.1007/BF01173204
- Wegner, D. M., Shortt, J. W., Blake, A. W., & Page, M. S. (1990). The suppression of exciting thoughts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 409-418. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.58.3.409