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Models of Trust: A study of youths and adults in America

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Abstract: Models of Trust: A study of youths and adults in America

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The need for trust affects each society and each time period differently, yet no one can deny its abiding significance. Trust is foundational for governments and nations, but equally so for more intimate relationships, without which larger power structures could not endure. Trust has also been thrust to the forefront of our national consciousness in the past few decades with the rapid growth of technology and the apparent decline in trustworthy leaders and institutions. With these considerations in mind, I spent two summers examining the different models of trust held by youth and adult populations in America.

I. Models of Trust Held By Young Americans

Introduction

In the summer of 2004 I interviewed fifty people (half of whom were community leaders, the other half ordinary citizens) aged 30 to 60 (average age: 50) on their notions of trust. The findings pointed to a general decline in trust concerning public leaders and prominent institutions. Results of this study are summarized in Gardner, 2005.

Intrigued by suggestive findings and trends, my colleagues and I decided to focus on youth aged 15-25 years. In the summer of 2005 I interviewed 63 young people using trust-related vignettes. My goal was to understand how today's young people conceive of trust and its various personal and societal implications.

Methods

Materials

The vignettes were grouped into three categories – Media-Person (MP), Person-Person (PP), and Media-Media (MM) – depending on the main focus of interaction within each one. For example, the MP category pitted the authority of an individual against a medium (e.g. a friend's version of a story vs. a newspaper's version of the same story). Likewise, the PP category compared the authority of two persons (e.g. a friend vs. a stranger) and the MM category pitted two media against each other (e.g. a local newspaper vs. a national newspaper). For reference, the vignettes appear in Appendix A.

Subjects

The sample of participants consisted of 63 people (18 male, 45 female) in the age range of 15-25 years, from the Philadelphia region. Data were also collected from each participant on affiliations regarding politics (23 liberal, 25 moderate, 15 conservative) and religion (21 religious, 16 semi-religious, 26 nonreligious).

Procedures

Each participant was interviewed using a series of six alternating vignettes from a set of sixteen. The vignettes were read orally to the participants in the form of short scenarios, or dilemmas. Each vignette related to an issue of trust, and was followed up by several questions. The interviewees' responses were written down and sometimes tape-recorded.

Results

This study yielded numerous findings. The most salient of these include: a general distrust of media and celebrities; the prevalence of culling from multiple sources as an information-gathering technique; the importance placed on independent thinking in self and others; and an ambivalent attitude towards unethical and frankly criminal behavior. In what follows these main findings are presented first, followed by differences within categories, and by individual differences. Lastly, a theory of mental models, or conceptualizations of the trust process, is proposed.

General Distrust of Media and Celebrities

Participants voiced their general distrust of media and celebrities across categories and through several scenarios. For instance, asked whether a participant would be more likely to buy a product if it was advertised by a celebrity, many participants volunteered that they would not buy the product because they believed the celebrities were "only in it for the money" and that they could therefore not be trusted. Asked whether participants would support a celebrity-spearheaded campaign against poverty, many also took this opportunity to express their skepticism and distrust of "Hollywood", questioning celebrities' charitable motives, calling them "selfish" and only in it "to benefit their careers." Others claimed that "celebrities endorse things more for show" and that "stars are [unjustly] glorified today."

Participants also used the MM category to vent their distrust of the media, including: print ("newspapers are more entertainment than anything"), online ("anything digital can be altered"), and television ("it's all biased"). One participant stated that "Americans are drawn to dirt" and blamed the media for sensationalizing headlines in order to lure customers. Another said that she just doesn't take anything as "straight fact."

Culling as an Information-Gathering Technique

Another popular cross-category finding revealed that many people get their information by culling from a variety of sources, media and otherwise. As previously noted, several participants described their technique of using many different sources to get the most well-informed perspective on a particular topic. One participant, for instance, said that she believes “all newspapers are biased” because they all have “some backing;” accordingly, she never reads just one newspaper or watches just one television news program. Instead, she “pulls from many sources to get information” and will be more accepting “where they are overlapping.” Likewise, she will watch CNN and Fox News to hear opinions from both sides of the political spectrum. Others went a step further than combining different news sources. Either they shunned domestic news sources altogether, preferring instead to get their information from foreign newspapers and television programs, which they claimed to be “less biased,” or they simply relied on news aggregators, such as RSS, Atom, and Google for quick, relatively objective information. These aggregators gather news stories and headlines in a single web-based location according to the user’s preferences.

Independent Thinking

Another finding across categories was the desire among participants to think independently about key issues in their lives; furthermore, participants also valued those who were independent thinkers themselves. The latter finding was most evident in participants’ responses to a particular scenario dealing with a coworker’s arrest. At first the participants were only told that their coworker, whom they did not know very well, was arrested for an unknown cause. Most participants answered that they might be a little more wary of their coworker, but that they would like to give her “the benefit of the doubt.” The participants were then told that the reason for arrest was because their coworker was protesting political causes. Upon learning this new information, nearly all participants became less wary of their coworker and quite a few went so far as to say that they trusted and respected their coworker more because of this arrest. Why did participants hold this person in a higher regard? Many cited “freedom of speech” and

“honesty” as key reasons, while others said it was because the coworker “had conviction,” “stood up for their (sic) own beliefs,” and “didn’t just blindly accept opinions.”

Along with respecting independence in others, many participants also stated the importance of independence of thought in their own decision making. This finding emerged through several scenarios. One scenario asked participants how they would decide to vote on a key issue – from information they researched themselves or from the opinions of a friend’s parents, who happened to be experts on that particular issue. All participants responded that they would vote for the side that their own research supported, trusting their own findings over simply following someone else’s views. Asked whether or not a participant would buy something based on a celebrity endorsement, many said that they had no regard for the celebrity and would prefer to make up their own minds about the product. What’s more, when told that a newspaper had criticized the celebrity’s product for its high cost and low quality, participants still said that they would not listen to the papers, preferring instead to come to their own conclusions. Lastly, participants expressed their desire for independence of thought when asked whether or not a common link of friendship between a roommate and the roommate’s friend (who is unfamiliar to the participant) would influence their judgment. In this case, most participants would disregard the common friend and make up their own mind about the roommate’s friend.

Ambivalence towards Crime and Unethical Behavior

In this rather disturbing finding, participants often had trouble defining ‘severe’ transgression: they were willing to pardon embezzlement and deceit on the grounds that these actions didn’t physically harm anyone and were therefore not considered to be severe offenses. In one scenario, the fact that a neighbor had apparently embezzled money was not enough to deter half of the people who answered the question (10 out of 21) from asking the neighbor to feed their dog while they are away for the weekend. Participants reasoned that the crime was “not severe enough,” and was “not the same as animal cruelty.”

Differences Within Categories

Within the MP category we found that most participants preferred and trusted their friends, rather than the media, as a source of information. For example, out of the 36 people who were asked to whom they would turn when choosing a movie to rent, 27 people said they would go with their friends' recommendation, while only 9 people said they would listen to the critics (who represent the media). Many stated that they would simply trust their friends' judgment over the critics, while others figured "if (they're) friends, (they) must share similar interests."

Within the PP category we found, surprisingly, that participants were split on their trust of a relatively unknown person. This finding is demonstrated by a dilemma that asked participants to decide if they would let a stranger who lived in their apartment complex take care of their dog for a weekend while they were away; the alternative was putting the dog in a kennel. Out of the 31 people asked this question, 15 said they would ask the neighbor and 16 said they would rather put their dog in the kennel. Furthermore, opinions were divided on the appearance of the neighbor—some people felt that this was a decisive factor (generally, older or middle-aged people, females, well-kempt, and those with pets/families of their own were considered more trustworthy), whereas others felt that "one can't judge a book by its cover."

Another interesting finding came from within the MM category. When buying a piece of technology such as a cell phone, participants were split between using a single reliable medium or a majority of media sources. In this case, out of the 33 participants asked the question, 14 chose the reliable source, 13 chose the majority source, and 6 chose either a combination of sources or neither (preferring instead to talk with friends or evaluate the phone in person).

In the MM category we were also surprised to find that many participants used the internet, but few read or knew of informative blogs. Age was a variable, as those participants over twenty were more aware of blogs than those participants under 20. Even

in the over-20 age category only a small percentage of people took the blogs seriously. This trend is subject to change, however, as the number of individuals who blog may be increasingly quite rapidly.

Another surprising finding within the MM category was the greater trust expressed by participants in local papers versus national papers. Out of the 21 people posed the scenario, 10 trusted the local paper, 6 trusted the national paper, and 5 trusted either a combination of the papers or neither of them, preferring to go to other sources, whether media, family, or friends – for their information. Why trust the local paper more? Participants gave reasons such as it “deals with the community,” “there are not as many constraints,” “it’s more specific,” “it directly affects people,” and it is “unbiased.”

Individual Differences

The split-answer scenarios revealed many individual differences (as compared to group differences between MP, PP, and MM). These differences were especially apparent between liberals and conservatives and between religious and non-religious participants.

There were several age-related differences between individuals, with ‘older’ participants referring to those aged 20 years and older. For instance, older participants were less likely than younger participants to trust an unknown neighbor to take care of their dog while they were away for the weekend. Older participants were also less likely to trust the neighbor after learning of the neighbor’s potential involvement in an embezzlement scandal. Older participants, however, were more likely to trust a local paper over a national paper.

It is worth noting here something of an ‘immature’ or ‘novice’ mindset associated with some of the participants’ answers. This mindset can be characterized as uninformed, influenced by friends’ opinions, celebrity-oriented, and majority-rules. The participants exhibiting these characteristics tended to be younger (19 and under), but the mindset is by no means limited to younger persons.

Several non-age-related differences between individuals also emerged. When it came to judging people based on nonviolent crimes, for instance, nonreligious persons were less judgmental than religious persons. In another example, when deciding on which source(s) of information to consult before buying a technological product, liberals were more likely to choose reliability of a source over a majority of sources. Nonreligious persons were also more likely to choose reliability over the consensus of a majority.

Mental Models

Although we were dealing with a small sample, we were able to identify a number of distinct conceptualizations of the trust process.

1. Knowledge-based

a. Professionalism

Participants of this mindset trust organizations, publications, and individuals based solely on the fact that they are either well-recognized in the public sphere or are seen as authorities on certain issues. This type of trust can be seen as a blind faith in professionalism. Quotes indicative of this mindset include: “I trust the critics because they are trained,” “I trust the critics’ opinions because it is their job,” “I trust national newspapers because they have to be prominent for a reason...and they attract the best writers,” and, “I trust professional writers because they must be working for a prominent newspaper for a reason.”

b. Elective ignorance

Elective language involves an explicit statement that one avoids the media deliberately. Participants who exhibited this mentality tended to say either, “I don’t read the news,” or “I don’t care about the news.”

c. Information-seeker

Unlike those who elect ignorance, information-seekers base their trust on the information they have gathered from a variety of sources; this information allows them to make an

educated decision. As one participant noted, “You don’t have to like it, but you’re not helping yourself by not being aware of what’s happening.”

2. Person-centered

a. Self-promotion

One who has a self-promoting concept of trust will put faith in something only if it advances one’s own interests. For instance, when asked to imagine themselves as high school athletes being recruited for a college sports teams by a corrupt coach, some participants stated that they would be willing to disregard the coach’s transgressions if it meant furthering their own athletic careers.

b. Neutral

Neutrality of person-centered trust is opposed to the goal-ordered nature of self-promotion. The former stance implies that although individuals may relate hypothetical events to their own lives, they are doing so in order to better understand the situation rather than to advance their own interests. People of this mindset tended to answer questions with personal anecdotes related to the scenario being posed at the time.

3. Other

a. Primacy

Participants exhibiting primacy were likely to take the first information they encountered as being true. As one participant explained, “I internalize what I hear first as the truth,” and another, “I judge based on first impressions.”

b. Contextualization

One who contextualizes bases her opinions on contingencies and never really takes a firm stance on the issues presented in the trust scenarios. Oftentimes answers will begin with, “It depends...”

While each mental model is legitimate on its own, many people were found to be amalgams of several styles. This reinforces the finding that participants tended to pick, choose, and combine information from a variety of sources.

Conclusions

Limitations

The most obvious limitations of this study were related to its sample – small, centered in the East Coast, and containing little socioeconomic diversity. A broader sample would yield more accurate and representative results. It would also allow for a more in-depth investigation of certain concepts, such as the immature mindset, which could potentially be developed into an age-related category of its own. In future studies, one would also want to vary the methods of inquiry (i.e. methods other than interviews using scenarios) and to standardize the scenarios across participants.

Future questions

Many questions were raised by this study. One such question immediately arises: ‘If younger people go to their parents and elders for information, and parents and elders go to their friends and spouses for information, where do the friends and spouses get *their* information if the media are ranked so low on trustworthiness?’ Along the same lines, it would be interesting to see if younger people are less discriminating than adults in determining their sources of information (in terms of their trust of others’ knowledge on certain issues); Do adults have more specific conceptions of trust? Another question related to information sources asks, ‘If the internet is not a trusted source of information, but younger people still use it, what *is* trusted on the internet?’ Likewise, how does one determine the reliability of a source? Lastly, does modern technology with its barrage of information breed shorter attention spans, indecision, and/or skepticism or cynicism? Perhaps this study will serve as a springboard for answering such questions.

II. Models of Trust Held by American Adults

Introduction

In the summer of 2006 I conducted a study of trust in adults aged 45 to 65 years. This study was designed as a follow-up to an earlier study examining trust in youth aged 15 to 25 years (Youth Study, above). The current study sought to uncover differences, if any, between the ways in which the youth and the adult populations conceive of trust.

Methods

Sample

The participant sample consisted of 29 individuals (15 male, 14 female) aged 48-64 years (mean: 54 years), hailing from San Francisco (7), a Philadelphia suburb (21), and New York (1). Participants spanned a range of political views (11 liberal, 9 moderate, 6 conservative, 3 moderate/conservative) and religious affiliations (2 New Thought¹, 6 Jewish, 10 Christian, 11 nonreligious).

Materials

Each of the trust dilemmas posted to participants consisted of a short scenario involving the trust of people and/or of media; the dilemmas were designed to elicit fundamental conceptions, or mental models, of trust. In order to accommodate an older audience, the dilemmas were revised slightly from the 2005 study. For instance, in the 2005 study, one dilemma called for participants to imagine themselves as a high school athletic recruit who encounters unethical behavior by a college coach trying to lure players to his school's team. In the 2006 study the analogous dilemma called for participants to imagine themselves as a businessperson being recruited by a boss who engages in unethical behavior in an attempt to lure prospective employees to his company. The trust dilemmas were not grouped into different categories (Media-Person, Person-Person, Media-Media), as they were in the 2005 study. The dilemmas appear in Appendix B.

Procedure

¹ "New Thought is a popular application of philosophical idealism, optimistic mental discipline, and the practice of the presence of God in healing and in daily living. The movement originated in 19th Century New England, and is now worldwide" (Anderson, 1993).

Each participant was interviewed using a series of five alternating trust dilemmas from a set of ten. The goal was to extract key differences between the age groups of this study and the 2005 study. Dilemmas were posed until participants' responses to them became repetitive. If a dilemma tended towards split responses or responses that seemed to be at odds with those of the 2005 study, the dilemma was posed with more frequency. Each interview generally took between 15-25 minutes.

Results

This study revealed several noteworthy differences between youth and adult sample populations in the 2005 and 2006 studies, respectively. These findings include the following trends: the tendency of adults to take a neighbor's feelings into consideration and their related desire to avoid imposition; a felt necessity on the part of adults to build and solidify permanent relationships; a disparity between the filters – or the amounts of information actively sought – employed by youth and adults; a distinction between business-like and non-business-like actions; and the concept of reputation as being fragile. From these findings, contrasting conceptions of trust emerge. The findings are listed below according to dilemma.

Neighbor/Dog Dilemma

Participants in both studies were asked whether or not they would trust a neighbor whom they'd known informally for less than a month to take care of their dog while they were away for the weekend; the alternative was placing the dog in a kennel. The Adult study extended the findings of the Youth study, which reported that older participants (20-25 years) were less likely than younger participants (15-19 years) to ask their neighbor to take care of their dog for the weekend. The Adult study found that only 3 out of 21 participants would ask their neighbor. This finding stands in stark contrast to the Youth study, where 15 out of 31 participants would ask their neighbor.

Why the disparity between age groups? Participant comments offer a number of likely explanations. For instance, a majority of adult participants who responded to the neighbor/dog dilemma explained that they wouldn't want to impose on or burden the

neighbor, a response that was rarely given in the Youth study. As one participant put it, “If someone did that to me, how would I feel?” Together, the arguments for imposition and role reversal point to an attitude of concern for other people’s (in this case, a stranger’s) feelings that was not expressed in response to this question during the Youth study. This finding could be the result of empathy – adults having had more opportunities to experience similar situations in their lifetimes, or of a level of politeness that becomes solidified with age.

Another set of linked responses to the Adult neighbor/dog dilemma offer insight into the reasoning of those participants who answered affirmatively. These two reasons were “You’ve got to trust somebody” and “You have to start relationships somewhere” – sentiments that stem from *necessity*. This type of response was not heard in the Youth study. One explanation is that young adults have more flexibility with their relationships – youth is a time for forging new relationships and, with changing interests and locations, little hesitation in dropping old ones. Adults, on the other hand, are usually more stable in their locations. Accordingly they are probably more careful when building new relationships, mindful of the high likelihood of permanence.

One participant’s analogy about relationships provides further insight into the disparity of responses between age group. The analogy - “When you’re starting a relationship, you’re like a sponge – you take everything in about that person” – alludes to the idea of *filters*. In the beginning of a relationship, one’s filters are set at a low level – they are open to any and all information about the other person. Once a relationship is established, one’s filters are high – not only does one receive fewer pieces of novel information about the other person, but one is also less affected by any new information, having already formed an opinion of that person. Because young people are generally more varied and flexible in their relationships – less “settled” than adults – their filters might constantly be set to “low” in order to keep up with the wealth of information coming from many different sources.

Superstore Dilemma and Employee Recruitment Dilemma

Subjects were asked whether they would still shop at a Superstore that may have made a donation in an unethical effort to influence a newspaper's evaluation of working conditions at the store. A number of adults responded that they would continue shopping at the Superstore because "it's just doing business," whereas "newspapers aren't businesses and shouldn't be bought or influenced." The distinction between business-like actions and non-business-like actions (with businesses doing "what they need to do to get by" and 'non-businesses' having less wiggle room for unethical behavior) is an intriguing one that was not mentioned in the Youth study. Instead, participants who would still shop at the Superstore gave inexpensiveness and accessibility as their chief reasons.

In contrast, in a dilemma about accepting a job offer at a company whose boss is using unethical behavior, adults answered cautiously. Many expressed concern about their reputation and not wanting to be associated with such unethical behavior. Others stated that the issue "is usually not one person, but a reflection of the corporate culture" and the company as a whole. Perhaps other supervisors are practicing similar behaviors and one day the employees "might be expected to do the same thing." While also expressing distrust in an authority figure engaging in unethical recruiting practices (in this case a college coach recruiting high school athletes), those in the Youth study took a different position. More often they indicated that they would still consider attending the college and playing for the coach if it meant that such a decision would further their athletic careers. Adults seem to view reputation as being more fragile than do youth, perhaps because they are more established in the careers and have more at stake.

Summary and Conclusion

The divergent responses of the two age groups document clear differences between young people and adults in the ways in which they conceptualize trust. On the whole, when asked to take care of a dog, adults trusted their neighbors less than young people did. Adults made the distinction between business-like and non-business-like actions when presented a dilemma involving a newspaper and a superstore; young people, on the other hand, did not make this distinction. In addition, adults were more likely to maintain

reputation is crucial but fragile and should not be put in jeopardy. When posed a similar dilemma, young subjects placed less stock in reputation and were willing to take risks in order to further their own interests.

These findings, and the reasoning behind them, suggest different modes of conceiving trust for young people and adults. On the whole, young people emerge as more easy-going with respect to matters of trust. They take in more information, are more willing to take risks, and place less importance on decisions made. Older individuals are more cautious and less willing to take a chance. They set a higher bar for taking in information, are more protective of their reputation, and are less willing to trust those whom they do not know. This caution is tempered with pragmatism. Perhaps on the basis of their greater knowledge of how the world works, the adults in the study are more accepting of the compromises made by business-- their idealism has been tested more than that of youth. We can synthesize these findings by saying that adults trust only when they have to or when they have confidence that the trust is well placed; the younger subjects are more trusting overall, even when there would be reason to hold the trust in check.

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Appendix A

Trust Dilemmas

Youth

MEDIA-PERSON

1. It has been a few years since you've seen one of your childhood friends. You and he shared fond memories together during elementary school, middle school, and high school, but have lost touch a bit since going to college. You talk on and off to your friend through email and occasional phone calls. Everything seems to be going well until one day you read in the newspaper that your friend has been thrown in jail for armed robbery.

Without talking to your friend, has your opinion of him changed? If so, how? If not, why? Would you feel conflicted about these varying accounts? Why or why not? What would you do to resolve this conflict?

You decide to visit your friend in jail, and he gives you another version of the story. Which version do you trust?

Would you feel differently about the situation had your friend told you about his problems before they were revealed to you? Does the fact that you've shared so many memories together influence your feelings about the situation?

2. You decide to rent a movie one night. You drive to the video store and narrow your choices down to two movies. You just can't seem to make up your mind, however, so you call one of your friends to help you decide. You tell your friend the choices and she tells you to definitely go with Movie A because she loved it so much. You remember, though, that Movie A was panned by critics. Movie B, on the other hand, was critically acclaimed, but your friend hated it. You're not sure if you and your friend have similar tastes in movies, only that you have completely different tastes in music. Which movie do

you pick? Why? What do you say to your friend when she asks you which movie you choose?

3. You have just turned eighteen and are excited to vote for the first time. Your state is holding a referendum on legalizing stem-cell research, which seems to be a pretty important issue, though you don't feel adequately informed about the topic. You talk to a close friend who says that he isn't going to vote affirmatively because his parents are not. You know that his parents are respected scientists who deal with these types of issues. You decide to do some research in newspapers and online and find that cures for certain diseases are likely to be discovered if stem-cell research is allowed. You are quite close to your friend's parents. What do you decide to do and why? Under what circumstances would you change your decision?

4. Imagine that you are a high school athlete hoping to compete in college. You have been a standout player since your freshman year and several colleges have expressed interest in having you attend their college and play for their team. You have narrowed your list down to two schools but have not yet made a final decision. Your coaches have always served as mentors/role models, so it is very important that your college coach do the same. The coaches of both schools are welcoming, but you particularly like coach XXX, who comes from a family situation similar to yours, and you feel like you connect with him much better than the other coach. You hear on the nightly news and read in the newspaper that a scandal broke at coach XXX's school- the coach is trying to 'win' players to his school by inviting them to parties, promising them 'easy' classes, and generally trying to be their friends.

Would the news affect your opinion of the coach of XXX ? Why or why not? Under what circumstances would you choose to attend coach XXX's school?

5. You would like to buy a new product but cannot make a decision. You see an advertisement with one of your favorite celebrities. Would you buy the product? Why or why not?

A few days later, you see / hear about serious accusations of misconduct by the celebrity from various sources in the news. Would you still buy the product? Why or why not? Do you think that this person should still be promoting such products? Why or why not? (probe for statements referring to celebrity, type of transgression, status as role model, etc)

PERSON-PERSON

1. You and your roommate have been best friends since the beginning of your freshman year at college. It is now junior year, and your roommate tells you that her best friend from home is coming to stay over for a few nights. You are excited to meet her, but are unsure of how you two will get along, especially while living together.

You believe that any friend of your roommate's must be a good person, and on the occasions when you have had phone and online conversations with her, you have gotten along well. You also know, however, that she goes to a school in another part of the country and holds totally different political views than do you and your friends.

-When you and your roommate's friend finally meet in person, what do you base your first impression on? (i.e. appearance, discussion, etc.)

-How much does the common link of friendship between your roommate and her friend overshadow any possible judgments that you might make about her friend?

-How will phone and online conversations factor into your impression of your roommate's friend when you meet in person?

-Is it fair for you to make judgments about your roommate's friend upon first meeting her, or should you reserve your judgments?

2. It's late at night and you're up writing an English paper that's due in the morning. You're starting to become very tired and don't know how much longer you can stay awake. Just then a friend IMs you to ask how the paper is going. You tell him that you are nervous because you haven't finished and it's so late. The friend offers to send you a detailed outline about the book you are writing the paper on. You are tempted to take the ideas, but remember that your friend has been suspended for plagiarizing before and are not sure if his ideas are original or not. Do you take his offer?

3. You are going away for a weekend and need someone to feed your dog. You just moved in to your apartment complex and don't know anyone except for your neighbor, to whom you occasionally speak while entering the apartment. Although you don't know him well, it costs \$50/night to put your dog in a kennel. Do you ask your neighbor to feed your dog?

Just before you make your decision, you overhear gossip that your neighbor was forced to leave his last job because of an embezzlement scandal. Do you trust him to be alone in your apartment while you are away?

4. Your boss asks you to present him with a summary report of a recent national issue with which you are only vaguely familiar. You know that your neighbor, with whom you are friends, is an expert in the area you are supposed to research, but you also know that she has strong opinions on the issue and has taken public stands defending her side. You've had trouble finding other sources, though, and are running close to deadline. Would you seek your neighbor's counsel on the issue? Why or why not? Under what circumstances would you do so? If you decide to seek her expert advice, how would you present it to your boss?

5. It's your first week at a new job and so far you know very little about your co-workers. It gets around to you, however, that one of them in particular has been arrested before. You are assigned to work on a project together.

Do you trust your co-worker to be honest and accurate in her work? Is there anything that would lead you to be more trusting of her?

You soon learn that your co-worker has been arrested for protesting a political cause. Does this change your opinion of her?

You then learn that his political opinions differ from yours. Does this change your opinion of her?

MEDIA –MEDIA

1. You have heard that a Walmart Superstore is to be built in your hometown. You have read a lot of complaints in a well-known, nationally-syndicated newspaper that Walmart does not compensate workers fairly and is not a good company. You decide to investigate the issue and discover that your local paper has devoted an entire section to an investigative story on Walmart. The paper concludes that Walmart is a very good company and brings jobs to each of the communities in which it is located. What do you think of the conflicting conclusions of the two news sources? Which do you trust? Why?

A few days later, your local news channel reports that Walmart promised to donate the newspaper \$20,000. Would this change your opinion of the newspaper? (Would you continue to read the newspaper?) Would this change your opinion of Walmart? (Would you shop at Walmart?)

2. You are in the market to buy a new phone. You browse through your favorite technology magazine, one that has always been reliable for you in the past, and you find

the phone that they say is the 'best buy'. When you cross-check this review with other reputable sources, such as other technology magazines and online review sites, the particular phone in question is given low ratings. Which source do you trust AND WHY? Do you rely solely on these sources or do you go elsewhere?

3. While watching TV, you see an announcement for a show on XYZ about outsourcing US jobs to China. You decide to watch the show, and soon realize that the show features no one who is critical of outsourcing. The next night, you learn that an XYZ program will be aired about another issue that interests you. Would you watch the program the next night? Do you think that the channel will give both sides of the issue? Does this affect your opinion of channel XYZ? Would you consider channel XYZ to be a reliable news source?

4. You pride yourself in staying up-to-date on the latest national issues, so when one comes up [specific one can be mentioned] you try to gather as much information as you can. You find two sources - a prominent internet blog and a prominent national newspaper - both of which have different opinions on the issue. You know that the internet blog is not written by a 'professional' in the field, but it is very informed and seems to have a popular following. On the other hand, the newspaper article is authored by a recognized professional. Would you use/trust one source more than another in forming your opinion? What would get you to change your mind? Why?

5. You recently saw a special about poverty in Africa, and decided that you wanted to become more active in the global fight against poverty. You decided to join a number of mailing lists and have visited a number of web sites, but are a bit overwhelmed. You have no idea where to start. While watching TV one night, you see a commercial featuring documentary filmmaker Michael Moore, an outspoken liberal, and Evangelical preacher Pat Robertson, an outspoken conservative, spearheading a poverty relief campaign. They announce a website where you can find more information about their campaign. Would you visit the website? Would you be more willing to support this campaign than the others you have heard about? Why or why not? What do you think of the celebrities-

would this change your opinion of them? (probe for celebrity status- are the celebrities knowledgeable sources? More accessible than academics? More believable?)

OPTIONAL

MEDIA-PERSON

1. You want to buy a new pair of shoes and see your favorite celebrity/sports star modeling them in an advertisement. You know these are the shoes that he/she wears, and in the ad they express how much they like the shoes and how well the shoes work for them. Plus, all of your teammates have the shoes. Before you buy the shoes, you come across an editorial in one of the most reputable newspapers in the country that criticizes the shoes for their high price and low quality. Do you buy them?

Appendix B

Trust dilemmas

Adult

1. It has been some years since you've seen one of your childhood/college friends. You and he/she shared fond memories together but have lost touch a bit since college. You talk on and off to your friend through email and occasional phone calls. Everything seems to be going well until one day you read in the newspaper that your friend has been thrown in jail for assault and battery.

Without talking to your friend, has your opinion of him/her changed? If so, how? If not, why? Would you feel conflicted about these varying accounts? Why or why not? What would you do to resolve this conflict?

You decide to visit your friend in jail, and he/she gives you another version of the story. Which version do you trust?

Would you feel differently about the situation had your friend told you about his/her plight before they were revealed to you? Does the fact that you've shared so many memories together influence your feelings about the situation?

2. You decide to rent a movie one night. You drive to the video store and narrow your choices down to two movies. You just can't seem to make up your mind, however, so you call one of your friends to help you decide. You tell your friend the choices and she tells you to definitely go with Movie A because she loved it so much. You remember, though, that Movie A was panned by critics. Movie B, on the other hand, was critically acclaimed, but your friend hated it. You're not sure if you and your friend have similar tastes in movies, only that you have completely different tastes in music. Which movie do you pick? Why? What do you say to your friend when she asks you which movie you choose?

3. You are a standout employee at your company but you need to relocate. Several companies have expressed interest in recruiting you. You have narrowed your choices down to two companies but have yet to make a final decision. Your current boss has always served as mentors/role models, so it is very important that your future boss do the same. The executives of both companies are welcoming, but you particularly like the boss A, who comes from a similar educational background as you, and you feel that you connect with him better than your boss B. You hear on the nightly news and read in the newspaper that a scandal broke at boss A's company- the boss is trying to 'win' favor with potential employees by promising them access to corporate resources for personal use (such as the corporate jet) and inviting them to company (exclusive after-hours) parties where illicit activities have been rumored to occur.

Would the news affect your opinion of the boss A? Why or why not? Under what circumstances would you choose to accept the job offer of boss A?

4. You would like to buy a new product but cannot make a decision. You see an advertisement with a celebrity whom you admire. Would you buy the product? Why or why not?

A few days later, you see / hear about serious accusations of misconduct by the celebrity from various sources in the news. Would you still buy the product? Why or why not? Do you think that this person should still be promoting such products? Why or why not? (probe for statements referring to celebrity, type of transgression, status as role model, etc)

5. Your significant other has learned that his/her best friend from earlier days is going to be in town and you agree to invite her to stay for a few days. You are excited to meet her, but are unsure of how you two will get along.

You believe that any friend of your significant other must be a good person, and on the occasions when you have had phone conversations with her, you have gotten along well. You also know, however, that she holds totally different political views than do you and your significant other.

-When you and the friend finally meet in person, what do you base your first impression on? (i.e. appearance, discussion, previous interactions)

- How much does the common link of friendship between your significant other and his/her friend overshadow any possible judgments that you might make about the friend?

- Do the differing political views of your guest matter to you?

6. You are going away for a weekend and need someone to feed your dog. You just moved in to your apartment complex and don't know anyone except for your neighbor (who you've known for less than a month), to whom you occasionally speak while entering the apartment. Although you don't know him well, it costs \$100/night to put your dog in a kennel. Do you ask your neighbor to feed your dog?

Just before you make your decision, you overhear gossip that your neighbor was forced to leave his last job because of an embezzlement scandal. Do you trust him to be alone in your apartment while you are away? (Probe for professional/ personal divide, degree of transgression, confirmation of rumor vs. fact, appearance vs. interaction.)

7. Your boss asks you to present him with a report on a recent controversial issue with which you are only vaguely familiar. You know that your neighbor, with whom you are friends, is an expert in the area you are supposed to research, but you also know that she has strong opinions on the issue and has taken public stands defending her side. You've had trouble finding other sources, though, and are running close to deadline. Would you seek your neighbor's counsel on the issue? Why or why not? Under what circumstances

would you do so? If you decide to seek her expert advice, how would you present it to your boss?

8. It's your first week at a new job and so far you know very little about your co-workers. It gets around to you, however, that one of them has been arrested before, but you don't know why. You are assigned to work on a project with that person.

Do you trust your co-worker to be honest and accurate in her work? Is there anything that would lead you to be more/less trusting of her?

You soon learn that your co-worker has been arrested for protesting a political cause. Does this change your opinion of her?

You then learn that his political opinions differ from yours. Does this change your opinion of her?

9. You have heard that a Superstore is to be built in your hometown. You have read a lot of complaints in a well-known, nationally-syndicated newspaper that Superstore does not compensate workers fairly and is not a good company. You decide to investigate the issue and discover that your local paper has devoted an entire section to an investigative story on Superstore. The paper concludes that Superstore is a very good company and brings jobs to each of the communities in which it is located. What do you think of the conflicting conclusions of the two news sources? Which do you trust? Why?

A few days later, your local news channel reports that a superstore promised to donate the local newspaper \$20,000. Would this change your opinion of the newspaper? (Would you continue to read the newspaper?) Would this change your opinion of Superstore? (Would you shop at Superstore?)

10. You are in the market to buy a new phone. You browse through your favorite technology magazine, one that has always been reliable for you in the past, and you find

the phone that they say is the 'best buy'. When you cross-check this review with other reputable sources, such as other technology magazines and online review sites, the particular phone in question is given low ratings. Which source do you trust AND WHY? Do you rely solely on these sources or do you go elsewhere? (friends vs. reviews, the store itself)

11. You pride yourself in staying up-to-date on the latest national issues, so when one comes up [like global warming or genetically modified foods] you try to gather as much information as you can. You find two sources - a prominent internet blog and a prominent national newspaper - which turn out to have different opinions on the issue. You know that the internet blog is not written by a 'professional' in the field, but it is very informed and seems to have a popular following. On the other hand, the newspaper article is authored by a recognized professional. Would you use/trust one source more than another in forming your opinion? What would get you to change your mind? Why?