
Coping With Accountability Cross-Pressures: Low-Effort Evasive Tactics and High-Effort Quests for Complex Compromises

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The current study explores two classes of strategies of coping with accountability: low-cognitive-effort decision-evasion tactics (buckpassing, procrastination, and exiting the situation) and high-cognitive-effort attempts to craft integratively complex compromises among conflicting perspectives. Some participants read weak arguments on one side of the free trade issue and strong arguments on the other side, and some participants read strong arguments for both the pro- and anti-free trade positions. They then expected their own views to be anonymous or expected to justify those views to a pro-free trade audience or to both a pro- and an anti-free trade audience. Participants were most integratively complex when they read strong arguments from each side and were accountable to conflicting constituencies (maximum intrapsychic and interpersonal conflict). Participants also relied on low-effort decision-evasion tactics to escape accountability and were willing to use escape strategies demanding relatively more time and energy to avoid accountability to contradictory constituencies.

Humans are enmeshed in webs of relationships and responsibilities. Individuals do not make decisions in isolation; rather, they are often called on to defend their conclusions and their reasoning to peers, subordinates, or superiors. Accountability, the social pressure to justify one's views to others, has repeatedly been shown to influence how and what individuals think. People also may respond to accountability behaviorally by engaging in actions that help them avoid or minimize accountability pressure. Tetlock's (1985, 1992) social contingency model of judgment and choice has provided one possible framework for exploring these effects.

Past work has shown that people rely on both low- and high-effort strategies for coping with accountability pressure. For example, if individuals know the views of their audience and are unconstrained by prior commitments, they may simply take the low-effort route of shifting their attitudes to match the views of the audience. If this simple tactic is unavailable, as when the views of the audience are not known, accountable individuals may become more self-critical and integratively complex (Tetlock, Skitka, & Boettger, 1989). Integratively complex thinkers try to see valid arguments on both sides of an issue and to balance competing legitimate concerns against one another. This differentiation and integration process requires considerable cognitive effort. Consistent with a motivated tactician or cognitive-manager framework (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Suedfeld, 1992), research on the social contingency model suggests that individuals will prefer low-effort strategies when such strategies are plausible and feasible. The magnitude of this preference also will depend on individual differences; for example, individuals high in need for cognition, or who enjoy effortful thinking, may be likely to engage in high-effort elaboration even when other alternatives are available.

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These findings parallel other dual process models in the social cognition literature. In the persuasion domain, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1987) both propose more and less thoughtful routes to attitude change. Similarly, models of person perception and stereotyping (Brewer, 1989; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990) indicate that perceivers may engage in low-effort, relatively automatic categorization processes or may put forth extra effort to individuate a target person.

Research has only begun to explore the role of different types of audiences in determining individuals' responses to accountability pressure. Specifically, an audience has generally been assumed to support one side of an issue regardless of whether that view is known; the audience may be a single individual with a defined position or a group with a consensus view. But an additional layer of complexity emerges when the audience can hold multiple or conflicting positions, thus creating accountability cross-pressures. The decision maker is caught in the middle, pushed one way by part of the group and pulled the other way by an opposing faction. The person is forced to defend a position in what may be perceived as a no-win situation, in which one side will inevitably be alienated (e.g., Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). This is the first study to examine how people cope with accountability to contradictory constituencies in either a social-cognition or attitude-change paradigm.

Individuals who wish to exert little cognitive effort may attempt to avoid being held accountable. Within real-world institutions, individuals have a variety of coping responses available to them above and beyond the widely studied phenomenon of strategic attitude shifting (cf. Cialdini, Levy, Herman, Kozlowski, & Petty, 1976; Schlenker, 1982, 1985). For example, Schlenker and his colleagues (e.g., Schlenker, Weigold, & Doherty, 1991) have identified three classes of strategies that individuals might use to change the timing, terms, or outcomes of being accountable. Individuals might retreat from or avoid accountability, provide excuses or justifications, or use apologies to avoid consequences of transgressions. Our research focuses on avoiding accountability.

Individuals may resort to a host of decision-avoidance tactics. Tetlock and Boettger (1994) investigated two strategies, buckpassing and procrastination, drawn from Janis and Mann's (1977) conflict model of decision making. In Tetlock and Boettger's study, accountable participants facing a decision that would change the status quo (whether to allow a fictitious new drug on the market) tended to buckpass and procrastinate when the decision was risky.

Our study highlighted the decision-evasion strategies of buckpassing, procrastination, and escape. When pass-

ing the buck, individuals attempt to shift responsibility for a decision to someone else. For instance, a person might delegate a difficult decision to a subordinate. Procrastination refers to delaying a decision, and thus avoiding the accountability pressure, at least temporarily. Procrastination may range from simply ignoring a decision to expressing the need for more time to analyze the issue. Escape, perhaps the most extreme of the avoidance strategies, occurs when an individual leaves the decision context entirely.

When motivated and able to do so, individuals may cope with accountability in more cognitively effortful ways. In particular, individuals may become more integratively complex in their consideration of the issue at hand, recognizing alternative perspectives on an issue, forming connections among these various viewpoints, and identifying trade-offs. This high-effort response might be particularly attractive when an obvious solution is not available, as when an individual is accountable to a conflicting, relatively high-status audience and both sides have presented cogent, hard-to-refute arguments.

Our study furthers understanding of accountability effects by exploring the joint effects of accountability and attitudinal cross-pressure and by permitting both higher and lower effort responses. We also examined a variety of behavioral options for avoiding a decision, thus providing a fuller exploration of the effects of accountability on individuals' actions.

In particular, we explored the following issues:

1. Accountability should affect how individuals think about an issue. In general, accountable individuals should be more integratively complex in their consideration of an issue than nonaccountable individuals. Such complexity should be highest when individuals are accountable to audiences with opposing views; to avoid potentially nasty confrontations, the decision maker might try to identify a compromise solution that will please both sides.

This complexity hypothesis begs the question, however, of how discriminating people become in their integrative complexity. Integrative complexity often is assumed to result in high-quality decisions, but in fact, there may be two distinct types of integrative complexity. The first possibility is that people shift into a relatively mindless form of integrative complexity, as illustrated by the dilution effect (Tetlock & Boettger, 1989; Tetlock, Lerner, & Boettger, 1996). People may treat weak and strong persuasive arguments (or nondiagnostic versus diagnostic evidence) equally: "On one hand, 200 customs agents may be laid off, but on the other hand, the economy may grow faster over the next 5 years (generating a million new jobs)." Another possibility is that integrative complexity is primarily a mindful process in which people do not automatically assume that all argu-

ments are equally valid. These individuals may explore both sides of an argument but discount weak or specious arguments in favor of more compelling ones.

These two possibilities imply different hypotheses. A mindless integrative complexity suggests that complexity will be greater when individuals are accountable to conflicting constituencies regardless of the strength of the arguments on each side. But if integrative complexity is a more mindful and discriminating process, we should observe greater complexity primarily when individuals are accountable to conflicting constituencies and both sides have presented strong arguments that can withstand critical scrutiny.

2. Participants who are accountable also should be more likely to engage in decision-avoidance strategies than nonaccountable participants. Simply having to justify one's views to others is often an uncomfortable situation that is likely to instigate decision-evasion. But being accountable to a conflicting constituency might make an individual especially likely to avoid a decision because of the dual forces of accountability and attitudinal cross-pressure. Passing the buck, procrastinating, or exiting the situation might allow the decision maker to delay or avoid entirely the stress of alienating one of the two disagreeing constituencies.

3. Furthermore, the tendency toward decision-avoidance in the face of conflicting constituencies may be especially strong when there are good reasons for supporting both sides of the issue. Intrapyschic pressure is created when an individual is exposed to strong arguments on both sides of a debate, whereas a decision could be made more easily when one side clearly has rational, convincing arguments and the other side relies on transparently specious arguments.

4. Individual-difference variables may moderate decision-avoidance. One possible moderator is need for cognition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), or the degree to which individuals enjoy thinking. For individuals high in need for cognition, who are accustomed to considering issues and contemplating complex problems, the idea of justifying one's ideas to others may be more of an opportunity than a threat. They may enjoy the challenge of comparing their views with those of the interviewers and the excitement of intellectual debate. Thus, regardless of the composition of the audience, individuals high in need for cognition may use decision-evasion strategies less frequently than their low need for cognition counterparts. Low need for cognition individuals do not enjoy thinking, and thus, any type of accountability situation where they are put on the spot to justify their views and reasoning is likely to be aversive to them.

It is less clear how need for cognition may moderate the impact of cross-pressures. It may be that people who like to think would be better able to appreciate the posi-

tions of individuals on both sides of an issue, particularly if both sides muster strong arguments for their position. This capacity to see both sides of the issue might make cross-pressures more aversive; alternatively, however, their enjoyment of thinking might lead high need for cognition individuals to find a middle-ground solution that could please both parties.

To investigate these hypotheses, we manipulated the presence or absence of accountability pressure and the degree of cross-pressures experienced by participants. We also varied the strength of the arguments presented on each side of the issue. Undergraduates who came to the lab were told that they would be participating in a study of their opinions on the issue of free trade, or the extent to which the United States and other countries should be allowed to sell goods in different nations without restrictions.

METHOD

Participants

The study consisted of 183 undergraduates who participated in small groups of 3 to 5 in a laboratory setting for partial course credit. They were randomly assigned to conditions within sessions.

Procedure (and stage-setting)

Participants came to the lab, ostensibly to participate in a study of their views on economic issues. An experimenter gave students initial oral instructions in the main part of a lab room. Behind the experimenter were two chairs with clipboards and pens, and next to the experimenter was a tape recorder and headphones. Because participants in the accountability conditions were later told they would be interviewed, this setup was designed to add realism to the accountability manipulation. It was subtle enough that participants in the not-accountable conditions would not see the equipment as unusual.

After initial instructions, participants completed the rest of the materials in individual cubicles. They were then debriefed and dismissed.

Accountability Manipulations

In the not-accountable condition, no mention was made of being required to justify their views on free trade. Participants in the accountable to unified constituencies group expected to explain their views to two graduate students who strongly supported free trade, whereas those in the accountable to conflicting constituencies condition expected to justify their views to two graduate students, one of whom supported free trade and another who opposed it.

Not-Accountable Condition

The not-accountable participants provided only the last four digits of their social security number on the cover page of the materials. The introduction to the study explained that the researchers were interested in students' views on free trade and informed them that "you are one of hundreds of students on campus participating in the study, and your participation is purely voluntary. Your answers will be completely anonymous, and they will be merged with those of hundreds of other Ohio State University (OSU) students." We attempted to eliminate any sense of individual evaluation.

Accountability Conditions

In contrast, participants in both the accountable to unified and accountable to conflicting constituencies groups provided their full name, social security number, and their psychology course section on the front of the materials. They were told that the current study was designed to prepare a report for a joint House-Senate committee on how Americans think about economic issues. The instructions emphasized that "Because you are one of a small group of people involved in this study, your participation is valued and highly encouraged." They were then informed that some individuals would be specially selected to be interviewed by the Economic Opinion Council, a panel of selected Ph.D. candidates in economics. This explanation was followed by the sentence, "You ARE/ARE NOT one of the specially selected people who will be interviewed." The word *ARE* was always circled.

The next page provided further instructions "for people who will be interviewed." The Council members would ask them to justify their opinion on free trade and would assess the quality of reasons provided for that opinion. They also were told that the interview would be audiotaped "so that we have a complete record of the thoughts and feelings that students have about free trade" and were provided with an audiotaping "Release Form" to sign.

Accountable participants were then informed that they would be interviewed by two members of the Council simultaneously and were provided with brief biographical statements about the Council members who would be present at their session. For instance, one interviewer biography read as follows:

Nathan is in his 5th year of the doctoral program in economics at Ohio State. His dissertation prospectus, "Free Trade: Benefits for America and the World," won him the prestigious Toops Dissertation Fellowship. Nathan believes that understanding the enormous benefits of free trade is critical for informed citizens.

For the accountable to unified audience group, both of the interviewers were in favor of free trade. For the accountable to conflicting constituencies group, one interviewer was strongly in favor of free trade and the other was vehemently opposed to it.

Manipulation Checks

After reading the interviewer biographies, participants in the accountable conditions responded to four manipulation checks. The first question asked if they had been selected to be interviewed; the following three questions were to be answered "only if you have been chosen to be interviewed." Participants then reported how many people would be interviewing them. Using a scale ranging from 1 (*very much*) to 7 (*not at all*), participants rated the extent to which the interviewers agreed with one another and the extent to which the interviewers respected one another. Because no mention of an interview was made in the not-accountable condition, there were no checks for those participants.

Affect/Anxiety Measures

All participants were asked to rate how much each of 10 affective terms (*dread, eager, nervous, excited, happy, reluctant, relaxed, thoughtful, looking forward to [the rest of the experiment], and bored*) described their current feelings on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Participants also answered the question, "Right now, at this moment, how do you feel?" on a 1 to 7 scale anchored by *very good* and *very bad*.

Free Trade Essay

Following the affect measures, all participants read a page-long essay with three arguments in favor of free trade and three arguments against free trade. Arguments were pretested to be strong (e.g., "free trade helps promote world peace") or weak (e.g., "free trade would force Americans to learn the metric system"). Some participants read weak arguments on one side of the free trade issue and strong arguments on the other side of the issue, and some participants read strong arguments on both sides. We counterbalanced whether the pro or con arguments came first in the essay.

After reading the essay, participants moved on to the first dependent variable packet. A cover sheet informed participants that all materials in this packet would be kept confidential.

Thought Listing

Participants were instructed to write down their thoughts and feelings about the topic of free trade. They were told that this exercise was to help them collect their thoughts and were reminded that all thoughts would be completely confidential. This thought-listing task was

used for later integrative complexity coding by independent raters.

Integrative Complexity Coding

Integrative complexity coding was performed in accordance with the integrative complexity manual (Tetlock & Hannum, 1988) by two trained coders who were unaware of the hypotheses being tested and the experimental condition from which the material had been drawn (intercoder agreement, $r(159) = 0.89$, $p < .001$). Disagreements were averaged.

Integrative complexity scores can range from 1 to 7. Thought listings received a score of 1 when they unequivocally supported or rejected free trade. Thought listings received a score of 3 when they recognized the legitimacy of conflicting perspectives on the issue but failed to integrate the competing views. An example of this level of integrative complexity is as follows:

I have mixed feelings about free trade. It is true that competition from other countries helps to keep American companies on their toes but it is also true that other countries sometimes don't play fair. . . . It is a hard issue and there is no easy answer.

Thought listings received a score of 5 when they not only recognized the legitimacy of conflicting perspectives on free trade but also attempted to resolve the tension or strike a reasonable trade-off between the conflicting considerations. For example,

There must be some way to strike a reasonable balance between these positions. American consumers benefit from having more choices, and they get more choices when other countries can sell their goods here. Still, American workers do suffer when they have to compete against workers in other countries who make far less and when other countries do not allow American goods inside their borders. So I favor free trade but only with countries that treat their workers right and that are willing to buy American goods when those are the best products.

Scores of 6 and 7 are rare in research on undergraduates in laboratory experiments, and none of the thought listings in this study exceeded a rating of 5.

Attitude Measures

Participants evaluated free trade on four semantic differential scales ranging from +4 to -4, anchored by bad/good, harmful/beneficial, wise/foolish, and positive/negative. Accountable participants were explicitly told that the interviewers would not see their answers to these items. Because these items were not public, we did

not expect strategic attitude shifting to occur, even among those accountable to a unified constituency.

Argument Strength Manipulation Check

Participants were asked how strong (compelling, convincing) they found the arguments in favor of free trade in the passage they had read and how strong they found the arguments against free trade. Participants then moved on to a second dependent variable packet.

Decision-Avoidance Measures

To assess buckpassing, we first informed participants that some people felt that their views were not representative of OSU students and that someone else should be studied to provide some justification for passing the buck. We then asked participants the degree to which they felt that the researchers should be studying someone else. For participants in the accountable conditions, this question assessed the hope that someone else would be interviewed in their place.

To assess procrastination, we asked participants whether they wanted to finish the experiment now or whether they would prefer to leave the experiment early today and come back next week to finish it (although they were reminded that they would not receive any additional experimental credit for doing so). Participants chose one of five options, ranging from *definitely prefer to finish now* to *definitely prefer to come back later*.

To assess escape, we told participants that the American Psychological Association code of ethics required us to remind them that they did not have to participate in any part of an experiment that they find to be disturbing. They then reported the degree to which they found the experiment stressful enough to refuse continuing.

Need for Cognition

We included the 18-item Need for Cognition scale (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984), which measures enjoyment of cognitive effort.¹

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

All accountable participants correctly indicated that they had been selected to be interviewed. (Recall that there was no mention of an interview for the nonaccountable participants; thus, they were not asked a similar question.) All but three accountable participants correctly reported that there would be two interviewers.² The accountable to unified audience participants differed significantly from the accountable to conflicting constituencies group in their ratings of the amount of agreement between interviewers, $F(1, 123) = 304.24$, $p < .001$; $M_s = 2.00$ and 6.20 for unified and conflicting audi-

ences, respectively. Because the extent of agreement between the interviewers was a critical variable, we dropped from our analyses participants who did not respond on the correct side of the midpoint for this item (e.g., less than 4 for accountable to unified or greater than 4 for accountable to conflicting). Sixteen participants did not meet this criterion; 2 additional participants were dropped due to missing data on this item.³

Participants perceived the interviewers as generally respecting one another, but those who were accountable to unified constituencies perceived more respect than did those who were accountable to conflicting constituencies, $F(1, 101) = 20.76, p < .01$; $M_s = 6.51$ and 5.46 , respectively.

For both pro-free trade and anti-free trade arguments, participants rated strong arguments as significantly more strong and convincing than weak arguments; for pro-free trade arguments, $F(1, 162) = 77.84, p < .001$ (M strong = 5.17 , M weak = 3.70), for anti-free trade arguments, $F(1, 162) = 79.25, p < .001$ (M strong = 5.03 , M weak = 2.77).

PRIMARY ANALYSES

General Responses to Accountability

ACCOUNTABILITY AND EMOTION

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis on our emotion measures. Two eigenvalues were greater than 1, and examination of a scree plot suggested a two-factor solution. The first factor, which we labeled anxiety, was composed of relaxed (reverse-scored), nervous, reluctant, and dread. The second factor, which appeared to be tapping more positive affect, included happy, excited, looking forward to, eager, thoughtful, and bored (reverse-scored). The two-factor solution fit the data adequately (root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = $.095$), and the factors were moderately negatively correlated, $r = -.34$. Anxiety and positive affect scales created from the factors had good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$ for positive affect; Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ for anxiety).

As expected, accountable participants were more anxious than were nonaccountable participants, $F(2, 161) = 31.04, p < .01$; $M_s = 2.17, 3.72$, and 3.77 for nonaccountable, accountable to unified, and accountable to conflicting audiences, respectively. However, Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) tests revealed that there was no difference in anxiety between the two accountability conditions (M diff = $.05, SE = .24, p > .50$). No difference emerged between accountability conditions on the positive emotion index, $F(2, 161) < 1, p > .50$.

The overall feeling measure also showed an effect of accountability, $F(2, 162) = 8.14, p < .01$; $M_s = 4.93, 4.49$, and 4.04 for nonaccountable, accountable to unified,

and accountable to conflicting audiences, respectively. LSD tests revealed that all conditions differed from one another at $p < .05$; nonaccountable participants felt the best, whereas those who were accountable to conflicting constituencies felt the worst. On this measure, cross-pressures appear to have exerted an additional emotional toll above and beyond accountability pressures alone.

The overall feeling measure was positively correlated with the positive affect measure, $r(162) = .51$, and negatively correlated with the anxiety measure, $r(162) = -.46$.⁴

Attitudes

To obtain a composite measure of attitudes, we averaged the four semantic differential items. Higher scores on the composite measure indicated more favorable attitudes toward free trade. There was no main effect of accountability on private attitudes toward free trade but argument quality did affect attitudes in the expected direction, $F(2, 161) = 14.60, p < .01$; $M_s = 0.15, 0.67$, and 2.10 for weak pro/strong anti, strong/strong, and strong pro/weak anti, respectively. There was no interaction between accountability and argument quality.

Low Cognitive Effort Responses: Decision-Avoidance

ACCOUNTABILITY AND DECISION-AVOIDANCE

We expected that accountability pressure would lead to increased decision-avoidance and that the additional presence of cross-pressures might lead to an even greater tendency toward decision-evasion. Although cross-pressures did not always produce an increase in decision-evasion, analyses generally supported our hypotheses.⁵ There was a significant difference between the accountability conditions in the degree to which participants (a) expressed a preference that someone else be interviewed (buckpassing), $F(2, 150) = 3.49, p < .05$, (b) showed a desire to escape the situation, $F(2, 155) = 7.73, p < .05$, and (c) wanted to procrastinate, $F(1, 133) = 3.52, p < .05$. Means are presented in Table 1.

LSD tests revealed that the accountability to conflicting constituencies participants were significantly more likely to buckpass than were nonaccountable participants (M difference = $.93, SE = .36, p < .01$); similarly, accountable to unified constituencies participants were marginally more likely to buckpass than nonaccountable participants (M diff = $.65, SE = .35, p < .08$). The two accountability conditions did not differ in buckpassing (M diff = $.29, SE = .36, p > .40$).

The escape measure revealed a similar pattern. Both accountable groups were more likely to want to escape than the nonaccountable group (M diff for accountable to conflicting = $1.28, SE = .37, p < .01$; M diff for accountable to unified = $.78, SE = .33, p < .05$) but the desire to exit the experiment did not differ significantly between

TABLE 1: Mean Decision-Avoidance by Accountability Condition

Accountability Condition	Decision-Avoidance Strategy		
	Buckpassing	Exit	Procrastination
Not accountable ($n = 58$)	3.76 _a	1.78 _a	1.38 _a
Low need for cognition ($n = 27$)	3.78 _a	1.62 _a	1.38 _a
High need for cognition ($n = 28$)	3.72 _a	1.92 _a	1.39 _a
Accountable to unified ($n = 55$)	4.41 _{a, b}	3.06 _b	1.45 _a
Low need for cognition ($n = 28$)	5.14 _b	3.71 _b	1.41 _a
High need for cognition ($n = 25$)	3.60 _a	2.37 _a	1.52 _a
Accountable to conflicting ($n = 52$)	4.69 _b	2.56 _b	1.89 _b
Low need for cognition ($n = 23$)	5.38 _b	3.32 _b	1.83 _a
High need for cognition ($n = 27$)	4.19 _a	2.00 _a	1.96 _a

NOTE: Range for buckpassing and exit: 1 to 7; range for procrastination: 1 to 5. High numbers indicate greater decision-avoidance. Within each column, accountability group means that do not share a subscript differ at $p \leq .05$, and need for cognition subgroup means that do not share a subscript differ at $p < .05$ (least significant difference test). For buckpassing, the mean for the accountable to unified audience condition differs from the mean for the not accountable condition at $p = .07$.

the two accountable groups (M diff = .50, $SE = .33$, $p > .10$). Cross-pressures did not appear to lead to increased escape motivation.

The procrastination measure, however, showed a different pattern. Both nonaccountable participants and participants who were accountable to unified constituencies showed little evidence of procrastination; there was no significant difference between these two groups (M diff = .08, $SE = .21$, $p > .60$). Participants who were accountable to conflicting constituencies, however, indicated a significantly greater preference to delay finishing the experiment until the following week, compared to the other two groups (M diff from not accountable = .51, $SE = .21$, $p < .05$; M diff from accountable to unified = .43, $SE = .21$, $p < .05$). When the costs of avoiding a decision were high—as in this case, where participants would have had to return to the lab a second time for no additional credit—the presence of cross-pressures increased decision-avoidance above and beyond accountability pressure alone.

In sum, accountability pressures affected decision-evasion strategies in the hypothesized direction. Furthermore, the presence of attitudinal cross-pressures did not increase decision-avoidance when these strategies were relatively easy to implement but did increase decision-avoidance for the strategy that would involve substantial cost to the individual.

Argument Quality, Accountability, and Decision-Avoidance

Argument quality did not have a main effect on participants' desires to pass the buck, $F(2, 150) = 1.03$, $p > .30$, nor did argument quality interact with accountability on this measure, $F(4, 144) < 1$, $p > .40$.

Argument quality had a marginal main effect on the escape measure in the expected direction, $F(2, 149) = 2.34$, $p = .10$. Individuals who had read strong arguments on both sides of the issue were most likely to consider refusing to continue participation (M weak pro/strong anti = 2.47, M strong/strong = 2.80, M strong pro/weak anti = 2.14). This main effect was qualified by a marginal interaction between accountability and argument quality, $F(4, 149) = 2.25$, $p < .07$. Individuals in the accountable to unified audiences condition who read strong arguments on both sides of the issue appeared to be most likely to prefer to escape the decision context.

Argument quality also affected procrastination in the expected direction: Individuals who read two sets of strong arguments were the most likely to want to procrastinate, $F(2, 127) = 5.09$, $p < .01$; M weak pro/strong anti = 1.44, M strong/strong = 1.96, M strong pro/weak anti = 1.31. We expected that the tendency to procrastinate would be greatest in the condition where participants were accountable to conflicting constituencies and were presented with strong arguments on both sides. A planned contrast confirmed that prediction, $F(8, 127) = 3.02$, $p < .01$ (see Table 2). Individuals experiencing both intrapsychic and interpersonal cross-pressure were the most likely to engage in the high-cost strategy of delaying the interview.

High Cognitive Effort Responding: Integrative Complexity

There was a marginal main effect of argument quality on integrative complexity, $F(2, 152) = 2.79$, $p < .07$. As expected, individuals who read strong arguments on both sides of the issue were the most integratively complex (M strong/strong = 2.35, M weak pro/strong anti = 2.04, M strong pro/weak anti = 1.88). More important, a planned interaction comparison revealed that individuals who were accountable to conflicting constituencies and read strong arguments on both sides were more complex than participants in all other conditions, $F(8, 152) = 3.30$, $p < .05$ (see Table 3). The combination of external cross-pressure and intrapsychic pressure proved to be a particularly potent instigator of complex thinking about the issue of free trade.

Accountability should be particularly likely to lead to integrative complexity when individuals are confronted with an audience with clearly conflicting views. Although there was a significant main effect of accountability, $F(2, 158) = 5.79$, $p < .01$, and the pattern of means was consistent with this hypothesis (M not accountable = 1.74, M accountable to unified = 2.18, M accountable to conflicting = 2.35), post hoc tests indicated that both accountability conditions differed from the nonaccountable condition but did not differ from each other.

TABLE 2: Procrastination by Accountability and Argument Quality

Accountability Condition	Argument Quality		
	Weak Pro/ Strong Anti	Strong/ Strong	Strong Pro/ Weak Anti
Not accountable	1.14	1.76	1.18
Accountable to unified	1.44	1.50	1.44
Accountable to conflicting	1.77	2.50	1.33

NOTE: Range: 1 to 5, with higher numbers indicating greater procrastination. Mean for group accountable to conflicting constituencies and reading strong pro- and strong anti-free trade arguments differs from all others in planned contrast, $p < .05$.

Individual Differences:

Need for Cognition

We divided individuals into high need for cognition (HNC) and low need for cognition (LNC) groups based on a median split ($Mdn = 60$; $MLNC = 48.86$, $MHNC = 69.66$).⁶ Seven participants scored at the median and were not included in need for cognition analyses.

There was no significant effect of need for cognition on attitudes toward free trade, and need for cognition did not interact with accountability in determining attitudes, $F_s < 1.5$, $p_s > .20$.

Need for cognition had significant main effects on both the amount of anxiety participants reported feeling, $F(1, 155) = 14.54$, $p < .001$, and their overall emotional state, $F(1, 156) = 4.73$, $p < .05$. HNC participants were less anxious ($MLNC = 3.62$, $MHNC = 2.78$) and felt more positive on the overall measure ($MLNC = 4.26$, $MHNC = 4.66$). They also showed significantly greater positive affect, $F(1, 155) = 12.89$, $p < .01$ ($MLNC = 3.39$, $MHNC = 3.97$). Enjoyment of thinking appeared to buffer HNC individuals from the general stress of participating in an experiment on an unfamiliar topic.

There were also marginal interactions between need for cognition and accountability on both anxiety, $F(2, 151) = 3.59$, $p < .10$, and overall emotional state, $F(2, 152) = 2.54$, $p < .10$.

For the overall feeling measure, nonaccountable HNC and LNC individuals reported equivalent emotional states ($MLNC = 4.89$, $MHNC = 4.89$). However, HNC individuals felt worst when accountable to a conflicting audience ($M = 4.19$) than to a unified audience ($M = 4.92$), $F(1, 50) = 5.66$, $p < .05$. LNC participants did not appear to differentiate between the presence and absence of cross-pressures, $F(1, 49) = .10$, $p > .70$ ($M_{\text{accountable to unified}} = 3.96$, $M_{\text{accountable to conflicting}} = 3.87$). Thus, HNC individuals appeared more sensitive to the views of the audience or, alternatively, more aware of the predicament caused by being accountable to individuals with opposing views.

Similarly, need for cognition did not moderate anxiety in the nonaccountable condition, $F(1, 53) = 2.20$, $p <$

.15. But in both accountability conditions, LNC individuals were significantly more anxious than their HNC counterparts, $F(1, 100) = 18.21$, $p < .01$ ($MLNC = 4.30$, $MHNC = 3.20$).

Need For Cognition and Decision-Avoidance

Need for cognition had a significant main effect on buckpassing, $F(1, 145) = 9.84$, $p < .01$. HNC participants were less likely to buckpass than were LNC individuals ($MLNC = 4.77$, $MHNC = 3.84$).

Similarly, there was a significant main effect of need for cognition on desire to escape the situation, $F(1, 146) = 8.57$, $p < .01$; $MLNC = 2.92$, $MHNC = 2.09$. This main effect was qualified by an interaction between need for cognition and accountability, $F(2, 146) = 4.18$, $p < .05$ (see Table 1). Post hoc LSD tests indicated that HNC and LNC participants who were nonaccountable showed similarly low desire to escape; however, under both types of accountability pressure, HNC individuals were less likely to want to escape than were LNC individuals.

Need for cognition did not have a significant main effect on procrastination, and it did not interact with accountability on this measure ($p_s > .50$). This finding suggests that for the participants in our study, internal motivational factors were less influential in determining whether individuals will engage in high-cost decision-avoidance.

There were no significant three-way interactions between need for cognition, accountability, and argument quality on any of the decision-avoidance measures.

Need For Cognition and Integrative Complexity

Need for cognition did not have significant main or interactive effects on integrative complexity.

DISCUSSION

Individuals often are accountable to multiple audiences, and these audiences do not always agree with one another. Under some conditions, these cross-pressures may make accountability particularly difficult for a decision maker. Any decision is likely to alienate part of the constituency, and even a compromise may antagonize both sides. Our study suggests that these combined pressures—making a decision in the face of disagreement and then being forced to justify that decision—may activate particular coping strategies: (a) avoiding the decision by passing the buck, procrastinating, or leaving the situation; and/or (b) engaging in high-cognitive-effort attempts to form integratively complex positions on the issue at hand.

Our study provides new insight into behavioral responses to accountability. Whereas the vast majority of

TABLE 3: Effects of Accountability and Argument Quality on Integrative Complexity

Accountability Condition	Argument Quality		
	Weak Pro/ Strong Anti	Strong/ Strong	Strong Pro/ Weak Anti
Not accountable	1.66	2.26	1.38
Accountable to unified	2.24	2.06	2.24
Accountable to conflicting	2.26	2.66	2.09

NOTE: Integrative complexity scores have a theoretical range of 1 to 7 (actual range 1 to 5). Higher scores indicate greater complexity. A planned comparison indicated that individuals in the accountability to conflicting constituencies condition who read strong arguments on both sides of the issue showed significantly greater complexity than all other participants (see text).

laboratory studies artificially constrain the behavioral options available to participants, our study incorporated a range of behaviors that real-world decision makers can and do take advantage of. We found that decisions to procrastinate, pass the buck, or escape the situation depend both on the type of accountability pressure one faces and the relative time and effort required by each strategy.

Furthermore, we found that intrapsychic pressures also interacted with interpersonal cross-pressures to evoke particular coping strategies. Specifically, integrative complexity and procrastination both peaked for individuals who were accountable to conflicting constituencies and who read strong arguments on both sides of the free trade debate.

Finally, our research has demonstrated that individual differences have measurable effects on individuals' responses to accountability pressure. In particular, individuals high in need for cognition appear to be better able to handle the pressure of justifying their views; they not only showed less anxiety when they first became aware that an accountability situation exists but they were less likely to engage in decision-evasion tactics.

Interestingly, we did not observe a relationship between need for cognition and integrative complexity. Although we might expect individuals high in need for cognition to be more integratively complex, the power of the situation may have overwhelmed individual motivational tendencies. In particular, the LNC individuals in the accountable conditions may have been more thoughtful than usual.

Beyond accountability, however, there are at least two reasons why need for cognition and integrative complexity were not related. First, need for cognition refers simply to enjoyment of thinking, not to the diversity of that thinking. An HNC individual may have provided a thoughtful essay on why free trade is beneficial but his or her one-sided argument would still earn a low integrative complexity score due to the lack of differentiation and

integration. On the other hand, all participants were provided with an essay that presented arguments both in favor of and against free trade. A LNC individual who simply repeated arguments from the essay might thus score more highly than he or she might under other conditions.

MINDFUL COMPLEXITY

Recall that integrative complexity could take two forms: a mindless complexity where all information, regardless of its merit, is used to draw conclusions and a more thoughtful complexity that emerges when only strong arguments from both sides are taken into account. Our results showed a peak in integrative complexity for individuals who were accountable to conflicting constituencies and were exposed to strong arguments on both sides of the issue. This peak suggests that a more mindful type of complexity was operating. Individuals attempted to craft a middle-ground or integrative solution primarily when both sides presented cogent points in their favor. If individuals were relying on a relatively mindless conversational-norm heuristic ("The experimenters wouldn't use these arguments if they weren't good ones") (Schwartz, 1994) or source-credibility heuristic ("These guys won awards for their work on this topic so the arguments must be good") (Chaiken, 1981), we should have observed increased integrative complexity in the accountability to conflicting constituencies conditions regardless of argument quality. A challenge for accountability research is to document when justification pressures lead to indiscriminate integrative complexity (as in dilution studies) as opposed to more discriminating forms of integrative complexity (as in many debiasing studies) (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Both patterns have now been documented but the boundary conditions for their occurrence have yet to be delineated.

CROSS-PRESSURE AND EFFORTFULNESS OF DECISION-AVOIDANCE

It is important to note that even though decision-evasion strategies in general require little cognitive effort, there is still variation in the amount of effort required by these strategies. People wishing to pass the buck might not elaborate deeply on the issue at hand but they might expend a great deal of time or energy to locate an appropriate substitute to whom to shift the responsibility. By contrast, procrastinating might involve similarly minimal cognitive effort but would not necessarily demand time or energy from the accountable individual.

In the current study, individuals who were accountable to conflicting constituencies showed a significantly greater tendency to avoid decisions than did individuals accountable to a unified audience only on the procrastination measure. In this study, procrastination was the

most effortful of the strategies. Under other circumstances, however, it may be easier to delay a decision than to find someone to whom to pass the buck. The logic of each situation will determine which strategy is most costly. Our results suggest that cross-pressures provide the motivation to engage in even a difficult decision-evasion strategy.

ALTERNATIVES TO EFFORT

Our decision-avoidance strategies differed on dimensions other than effort, however, and these other dimensions provide alternative explanations for the differences between procrastination and buckpassing or escape. For example, participants might have felt as though they were admitting weakness if they claimed that their views were not representative of OSU students (buckpassing) or that they found the experiment stressful (escape). In contrast, procrastination did not appear to have any negative personal implications.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESPONSES TO ACCOUNTABILITY PRESSURE

An important question for future research is the relationships among the various coping responses to accountability. Tetlock and Boettger (1994) suggested that integrative complexity will be positively related to buckpassing and procrastination because the greater complexity one sees in a problem, the more attractive decision-avoidance becomes. And indeed, they provided evidence that complexity was associated with avoidance for people accountable to a single individual. The process also may be reversed: A person who wants to delay a decision may frame the issue in a complex way in an effort to justify the delay. It may be harder to justify such a delay if the problem is framed as straightforward. Such complementarity between strategies may be most likely for those high in need for cognition, who tend to think about problems even when not personally affected by them.

On the other hand, buckpassing or procrastination may be inversely related to integrative complexity. Once a person decides to shift responsibility, he or she may not bother to consider the issue in-depth and attempt to craft an integrative compromise. In this case, decision-evasion frees the person from further consideration of the issue. This inverse relationship may be most likely for LNC individuals, who avoid thinking when they can.

The design of the current study did not allow us to investigate these relationships fully because individuals were not aware that they would have the opportunity for decision-evasion until quite late in the study. These options were presented well after individuals had to list their thoughts about free trade; thus, individuals could not substitute a low-effort decision-evasion strategy for the presumably higher effort route of thinking in a com-

plex way about free trade. With these cautions in mind, the correlations between strategies in our study are presented in Table 4. In the real world, individuals often consider a range of options simultaneously; individuals may prefer one strategy over another or may use multiple strategies at once.

Furthermore, individuals may recognize which strategy is likely to be most effective in a particular situation. In the current study, participants had no idea whether the researcher would actually take seriously their preference to have another individual be interviewed or to come back later. The rational approach, then, might have been to try all the strategies, in the hopes that at least one would pay off and allow the participant to avoid the aversive situation. On the other hand, if participants did not think that their responses on these measures would actually translate into accountability avoidance, this may have attenuated the predicted differences. Cross-pressured participants may not have bothered expressing an extreme preference for avoidance if they did not believe that the preferences would affect the experimenter's actions.

In other situations, if passing the buck will solve the problem, then it may be unlikely that a decision maker would also procrastinate. A question for future research is the conditions under which decision-avoidance strategies are likely to be positively versus negatively related.

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE AUDIENCE

In the current study, participants perceived even the two conflicting constituencies to be mutually respectful.⁷ Even in the face of this presumably respectful interaction, the pressure of being accountable to those with competing views made participants favor decision-evasion strategies. In many situations where cross-pressures exist, however, the competing audiences may have developed dislike, hatred, or complete lack of respect for one another. It seems likely that when interpersonal antagonism and outright rejection of opposing views exists, decision-evasion strategies may become even more attractive (Tetlock, 1999). Integratively complex thinking may become less attractive because decision makers may perceive that a middle-ground solution would not only be rejected by both sides but would lead to additional censure because ideas proposed by the opposition are viewed as illegitimate, even evil. An integratively complex thinker may be seen as a traitor by both sides.

ROLE OF PRIOR ATTITUDES

We chose the issue of free trade in part because we assumed that undergraduates would not have strong prior opinions about it. We assumed that attitudes would be formed based primarily on the information provided to them, and in fact, argument quality significantly influenced free trade attitudes. A strong prior attitude, how-

TABLE 4: Correlations Between Strategies for Coping With Accountability

	<i>Buckpass</i>	<i>Escape</i>	<i>Procrastination</i>	<i>Integrative Complexity</i>
Buckpass	1.0			
Escape	.48**	1.0		
Procrastination	.20*	.24**	1.0	
Integrative complexity	-.03	.04	.13	1.0

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

ever, might moderate the effects found here. For instance, a person strongly opposed to free trade might be more comfortable justifying his views to a divided audience rather than a unified audience that supported free trade. Such a person might be more likely to engage in decision-avoidance when faced with being accountable to multiple parties who disagreed with his position.

CROSS-PRESSURES IN THE POLITICAL DOMAIN

Our findings are easily applicable to the political domain. One would be hard-pressed to find a member of Congress who was not accountable to at least two conflicting constituencies. Even average citizens can face political cross-pressures. One's friends might support the Republicans, whereas one's spouse favors the Democrats. As a supplement to our data, we used a survey on the U.S. presidential election (see Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995, for details) to examine the effects of cross-pressure on the timing of citizens' vote decisions. Respondents were asked how frequently they discussed politics with as many as six specific others and how often they disagreed with each person. We used these measures to construct an overall index of how much conflict respondents experienced in their discussions.

We predicted that individuals who experienced a great deal of conflict in their political discussions would react to this cross-pressure by deferring their vote decision until late in the campaign. Results supported our prediction: Ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions revealed that although the more people talked about politics the earlier they made their vote decisions ($b = .29$, $p < .01$), the more people disagreed with others about political matters the later in the election season they made their vote decision ($b = -.28$, $p < .01$). This was true even when controlling for strength of party identification, an important determinant of how far in advance voters make their decision. Cross-pressure appears to have led to procrastination in the voting context.

BEWARE OF PREMATURE NORMATIVE JUDGMENTS

In actual policy-making contexts, decision-avoidance strategies may be frowned on. It would be easy to say that the preferable response to accountability pressures would be to craft an integratively complex compromise, but in fact, there are circumstances in which complexity is not the best option (see Tetlock, in press; Tetlock, Armor, & Peterson, 1994). Sometimes simple adherence to one side of an issue places one on moral high ground. Furthermore, when one attempts to integrate weak arguments, one only dilutes decision quality. With respect to free trade, as with many other issues, whether it is good or bad to be integratively complex hinges on a myriad of extra-psychological assumptions about the merits of specific arguments and evidence adduced by the competing factions.

Accountability research has taken steps toward investigating the institutional structures in which individuals make choices; by investigating the role of cross-pressures in accountability settings, the current study is an important advance in understanding a common interpersonal and institutional dilemma. Cross-pressures arise often in social, political, and business life. Dual-process theories of social cognition, especially the social contingency model, may be enhanced by addressing how people think, feel, and act when placed in accountability cross-pressures.

NOTES

1. Participants also completed the Need for Closure Scale (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993), which assesses individuals' desire to have a "definite answer on some topic, any answer as opposed to confusion and ambiguity" and the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR) (Paulhus, 1991), which measures both self-deception and impression management. Because of the difficulties inherent in interpreting the meaning of the self-deception scale (and Paulhus's 1984 recommendation that self-deception not be controlled for in examining personality variables), we were primarily interested in the possible effects of the impression management scale. Except for a main effect of need for closure on integrative complexity (such that individuals higher in need for closure showed less integrative complexity) (see also Tetlock, 1998), need for closure and impression management did not have main effects or interactive effects on our primary measures. Therefore, they will not be discussed in this article.

2. We retained these 3 participants in our analyses because the number of interviewers was less psychologically important than the extent of agreement between the interviewers, and all participants who reported an incorrect number of interviewers gave a number greater than 2.

3. Eleven excluded participants were in the accountable to conflicting constituencies condition, and 5 were in the accountable to unified audience condition. (Although participants had not yet read the essay when they completed these manipulation checks, dropped participants were approximately evenly distributed across argument quality conditions.) The dropped participants were somewhat lower in need for cognition than those retained in the analysis but this difference was nonsignificant and of negligible magnitude (need for cognition for

excluded participants: $M = 57.44$, $SD = 11.51$; for included participants: $M = 59.41$, $SD = 12.61$).

4. Because participants completed the emotion measures before reading the essay, we were unable to assess the interactive effect of accountability and argument quality on emotions.

5. As part of the accountability manipulation, but before the constituencies were introduced, participants were asked to sign a release form for audiotaping. Although this form was not originally intended as a dependent variable, failure to sign this form could be considered a subtle form of decision-evasion; the lack of signature would not have been noticed by the experimenters until later in the session but this technicality might still allow the participant to avoid the interview. The majority of accountable participants signed the form; however, 9 participants provided no signature. A minority of participants thus appeared to have created their own strategy for decision-avoidance.

6. As expected, there was no significant effect of accountability, argument quality, or their interaction on need for cognition scores (all F s < .15, all p s > .20).

7. In fact, in a subset of participants (not reported here), we attempted to create "no respect" conditions in which the conflicting constituencies did not recognize the legitimacy of the opposing side. We described the free trade debate as bitter and characterized by a lack of respect for the opposing position, and the interviewer descriptions included a quote from each interviewer derogating anyone who disagreed with his position. Even with these changes, however, we were unable to override participants' default assumption that the interviewers respected one another.

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