

Effects of Responding or Not Responding to Hecklers on Audience Agreement with a Speaker

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The hypothesis that responding to hecklers would produce more agreement with a speaker than not responding, stemmed from commodity theory (Brock, 1968). One hundred twenty-one introductory speech students participated in what they were told was a "speech workshop" (not a psychology experiment). Two types of responding to live hecklers were used: In one, the speaker responded in a calm, relevant manner; in the other, she responded in an upset, irrelevant manner. In a third condition, the speaker did not respond to the heckles. There were two additional conditions: One in which the speaker responded to interruptions, and a further control in which there were neither heckles nor interruptions. In these five conditions, the speaker either argued for or against the audience's position. Regardless of whether or not the speaker's position agreed with the audience's, upset-irrelevant responding decreased the speaker's persuasiveness over making no response, while calm-relevant responding tended to enhance persuasiveness. Finally, in agreement with all other empirical studies, it was clearly shown that heckling, whether responded to or not, did *not* improve the speaker's effectiveness.

Throughout history, prominent speakers have been bothered by hecklers. Probably the most salient recent example was the 1972 presidential election. During the period of campaigning, each of the major candidates was confronted by hecklers at one point or another. The politicians differed in their methods of handling the hecklers, and they differed in their perceptions of the impact of the hecklers on their persuasive appeals. For example, the

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²The authors are thankful to Nancy Pierce-Leeth and John Walker for their valuable contributions and are also grateful for the cooperation of Dr. John J. Makay of the Department of Speech Communication. Anthony G. Greenwald, Lloyd R. Sloan, and Robert B. Cialdini made helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

popular press reported that candidate Edmund Muskie's tactic of engaging the hecklers in debate seemed successful, and George Wallace consistently maintained that hecklers advance his cause (*Newsweek*, October 7, 1968). On the other hand, former presidential counsel, John Dean, began his six-hour opening statement to the Senate Watergate Committee on June 25, 1973, by stating:

To one who was in the White House and became somewhat familiar with its inner workings, the Watergate matter was an inevitable outgrowth of a climate of excessive concern over the political impact of demonstrators. . . . In early February of 1972, I learned that any means—legal or illegal—were authorized by Mr. Haldeman to deal with demonstrators when the President was traveling or appearing some place (*Washington Post*, June 26, 1973, p. A8).

Just what are the effects of heckling? Recently, a number of investigators have begun to study the phenomenon directly. Ware and Tucker (1974) found that heckling lowered subjects' ratings of a high credibility communicator. Silverthorne and Mazmanian (in press) concluded that heckling decreased the persuasive impact of a message in live, video, and audio presentations. Sloan, Love, and Ostrom (1974) found that heckling of videotaped speeches by Nixon and Muskie produced opposition in subjects who were initially neutral to the two candidates, no change for observers with initially extreme opinions about Nixon, and change toward neutrality for observers with initially extreme opinions about Muskie. In short, the most consistent finding so far is that, in most situations, heckling tends to hurt the speaker rather than help him. In the studies cited, however, the speaker did not respond to the hecklers. In fact, in two of the studies it was impossible for the speaker to respond, either because both the speaker and hecklers were presented to subjects in a taped message (Ware & Tucker, 1974) or because, although the hecklers were "live," the speaker was on videotape (Sloan et al., 1974). In real life, however, a speaker who is confronted by hecklers has the choice of making a response, or remaining aloof. The aim of the present study was to vary the responsiveness of a speaker to hecklers and to gauge the impact of this responding on audience opinion.

Responsiveness has already been shown to be an important psychological variable. Krasner (1958), in reviewing the verbal conditioning literature, concluded that responsiveness was an important shaper of verbal behavior. Buss (1966) demonstrated that the responsiveness of a confederate in the aggression-machine paradigm could significantly affect the magnitude of shocks delivered by naive subjects, and Davis (1973) showed that the responsiveness of a confederate could also significantly affect the magnitude of pleasure giving. Rosenfeld (1966) found that in dyadic interactions certain types of responsiveness—such as the attentiveness of person A to person

B—produced positive correlations with approval of person A by person B. The work on responsiveness clearly implies that responsive speakers will be perceived differently than nonresponsive ones, and Rosenfeld's work especially suggests that responsive speakers might elicit more approval from their audiences as well.

The major hypothesis of this study was that responding to hecklers would produce more agreement with a speaker than remaining aloof, and that this would be true regardless of whether the response was a calm-relevant one or an upset-irrelevant one. In short, it was predicted that some response would be better than none (i.e., remaining silent). This hypothesis is consistent with commodity theory as outlined by Brock. The theory explicitly states that "a message will increase in effectiveness, the greater the perceived effort involved for the communicator either to conceal or transmit it" (Brock, 1968, p. 249). In the present study, it seemed that commodity theory would predict that, if the speaker made some effort to deal with the hecklers, and the audience perceived this effort on the part of the speaker, his effectiveness should be enhanced over a condition in which no response was made.

If the general effect of heckling is to decrease the persuasiveness of an appeal, as previous studies seem to indicate, then responding, if it is perceived as effortful, may allow the speaker to regain some lost ground. The question of how to deal with hecklers is an important practical one for political candidates, as well as for all speakers who tackle controversial issues.

METHOD

Subjects

The 121 subjects were undergraduate students enrolled in introductory speech courses at the Ohio State University. Over 90% of the subjects were given extra credit in their courses for attending what was described as a "Speakers' Workshop."

Procedure

Subjects were informed in their speech class that each year the Ohio State University Speakers' Workshop conducts a short course in speaking techniques for speakers who want to improve their skills. They were further instructed that as part of the workshop course, each speaker prepares and presents a brief speech on a timely topic with which he or she is personally concerned. The speech would then be evaluated by members of the audience. The speech students were invited to sign up to attend one of several such speeches.

When subjects arrived at the designated room in the Student Union, they were again told about the purpose of the workshop. They listened to and

TABLE I
HECKLES AND RESPONSES

Heckle	Calm-relevant response	Upset-irrelevant response
1. The lighting facilities?	Yes, the lighting facilities.	What? Oh, oh well.
2. This all sounds crazy!	You really haven't heard enough to think it's crazy yet.	Oh, ummm, just let me go on.
3. But we already have a campus bus service!	I've really studied this, and the present system just isn't adequate.	O.K., O.K., let me finish, would you.
4. No, I think you're all wrong about that.	I really think this program makes some very constructive changes.	Oh, come on, I'm almost done.
5. That money isn't going to do all that good.	Look, even if we accomplish half of what we're asking, it will really upgrade the quality.	Look, I just want to finish this speech, and get out of here.

rated a taped 10-minute speech. This was done mainly so that the "key" live speech could begin late and thus solve the problem of latecomers creating an extraneous distraction during the live speech. This initial activity also served to legitimize the workshop. The live speech was approximately 8 minutes in length and was delivered by a female in her early 30s who was introduced as a member of the Ohio State University Task Force on Higher Education. After rating the speech, the subjects were dismissed. One entire session lasted about 35 minutes. No subjects expressed suspicion that they were participating in a psychological experiment. The participants in the study were debriefed in their speech classes after all experimental conditions were run.

Independent Variables

The design included three conditions in which the speaker was heckled, one in which the speaker was interrupted by a timekeeper, and one in which there were no heckles or interruptions. In the conditions in which the speaker was heckled, three different types of response to heckles were examined.

Calm-relevant condition. The speaker calmly and confidently addressed the point raised by the heckler.

Upset-irrelevant condition. The speaker made a response to the heckles, but did not address the point raised, and seemed upset. (All heckles and responses are presented in Table 1.)

No-response condition. The speaker paused for, but ignored the heckles, making no response. In all of the heckling conditions, two undergraduate student hecklers were employed, one male and one female. The hecklers came individually to the workshop session, and were seated separately. Five heckles were introduced into each speech. The first heckle came at approximately 2.5 minutes into the speech, and the other four were spaced about 80 seconds apart.

Interruption-only condition. One of the two confederates "volunteered" to be a timekeeper and was instructed by the workshop director to signal the speaker at designated intervals. At five points during the speech (corresponding to when the heckles would have occurred), the timekeeper raised his right hand in a manner visible to the entire audience. In this condition, the speaker acknowledged each of the timekeeper's signals by pausing and saying "thank you."

Speech-only condition. The speech was given uninterrupted in this final condition.

These five conditions (calm-relevant, upset-irrelevant, no-response, interruption-only, and speech-only) were crossed with pretested pro- and counter-attitudinal speeches. Actually, over 95% of the content of both speeches was identical. Both called for increasing expenditures at Ohio State University by 25%. The counter-attitudinal speech called for doing this by raising student tuition by 25%, while the pro-attitudinal speech called for raising the money by taxing "visitor services." The arguments used by the speaker in favor of increasing expenditures in both speeches were: Faculty salaries could be increased; research facilities could be improved; physical improvements to the campus could be made, such as improving the lighting in classes; new library facilities could be constructed; and a workable campus shuttle system could be initiated.

Dependent Variables

After hearing one of the speeches, subjects completed a booklet in which they were to rate aspects of the speaker, the topic, and the audience. The booklet contained 26 questions which they could answer by checking yes or no, or using a 7-point Likert scale. The primary dependent variable of interest was the extent to which each subject "agreed with the speaker's recommendations."

Summary of Design

Two versions of the message and five types of responding produced a 10 cell design. The number of subjects per cell (noted in Tables 3 and 4) varied

from 9 to 18 because different numbers of subjects attended each workshop session. The 10 speeches required for the design were run in a preselected random order on three consecutive nights. In this design, each version of the speech was given 5 times, and each response condition was run twice—once with the pro-attitudinal speech and once with the counter-attitudinal speech. Every attempt was made to keep the 10 sessions required for the design similar in every respect except for the key independent variables. Three of the 121 subjects were excluded from the analyses because they failed to complete the rating booklets.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

The first check of interest was whether the messages were actually pro- and counter-attitudinal. An analysis of variance on the primary dependent variable of interest (Table 2) showed that subjects agreed with the recommendations of the speaker more in the pro- ($\bar{X} = 4.27$) than in the counter- ($\bar{X} = 2.30$) attitudinal speeches ($F = 65.38$, $df = 1/108$, $p < .001$). Supplementary dependent measures indicated that the speaker was rated as more credible in the pro- ($\bar{X} = 4.96$) than in the counter- ($\bar{X} = 3.92$; $F = 11.48$, $df = 1/108$, $p < .001$), and more persuasive in the pro- ($\bar{X} = 3.77$) than in the counter- ($\bar{X} = 2.99$) attitudinal speeches ($F = 6.19$, $df = 1/108$, $p < .014$). Subjects also reported feeling more similar to the speaker in the pro- ($\bar{X} = 3.87$) than in the counter- ($\bar{X} = 2.48$) attitudinal speeches ($F = 24.25$, $df = 1/108$, $p < .001$).

The second check of interest was how subjects perceived the response of the speaker to the heckles and interruptions. Subjects rated the speaker as significantly more disturbed by the heckles in the two upset-irrelevant conditions ($\bar{X} = 5.51$) than in the two calm-relevant conditions ($\bar{X} = 2.96$) as planned ($F = 38.96$, $df = 1/95$, $p < .001$). Also, it can be seen from Figure 1

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ON RATED AGREEMENT WITH
THE SPEAKER

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Message type (A)	1	114.26	65.38*
Response type (B)	4	21.03	12.03*
A X B	4	3.83	2.19
Error	108	1.75	

* $p < .001$.

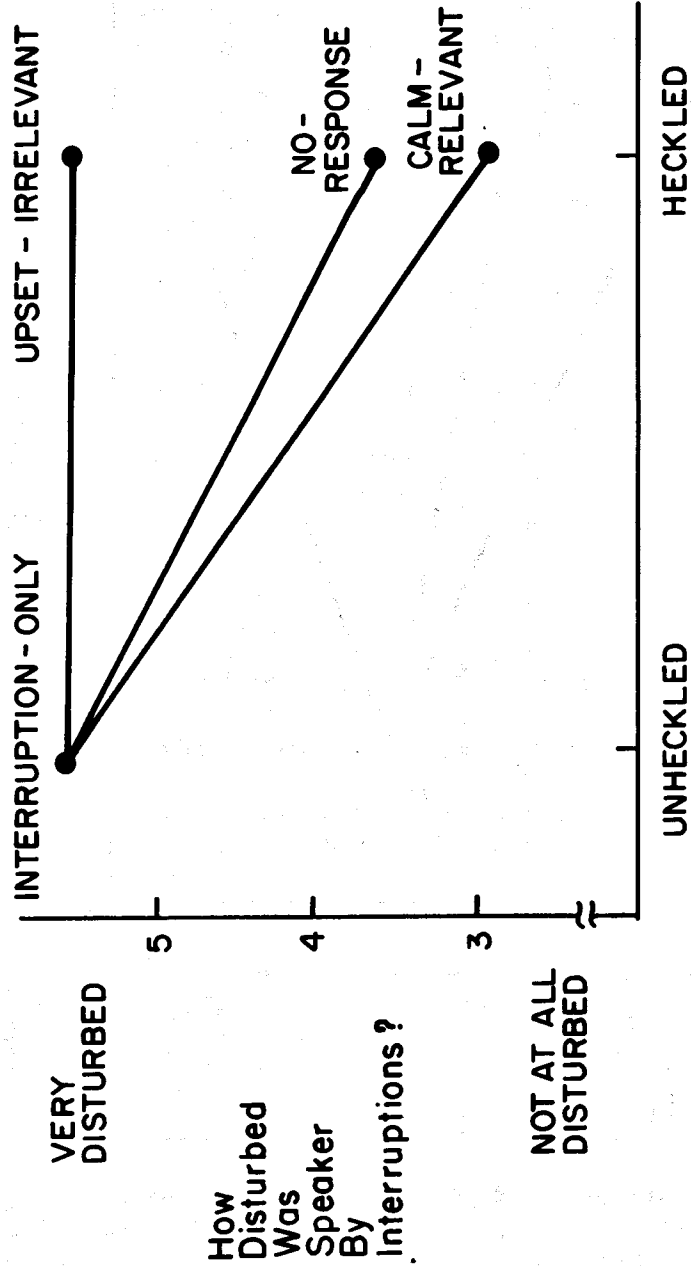


FIG. 1. Effect of responsiveness on perceptions of the speaker being disturbed by the interruptions (combined data for the two messages).

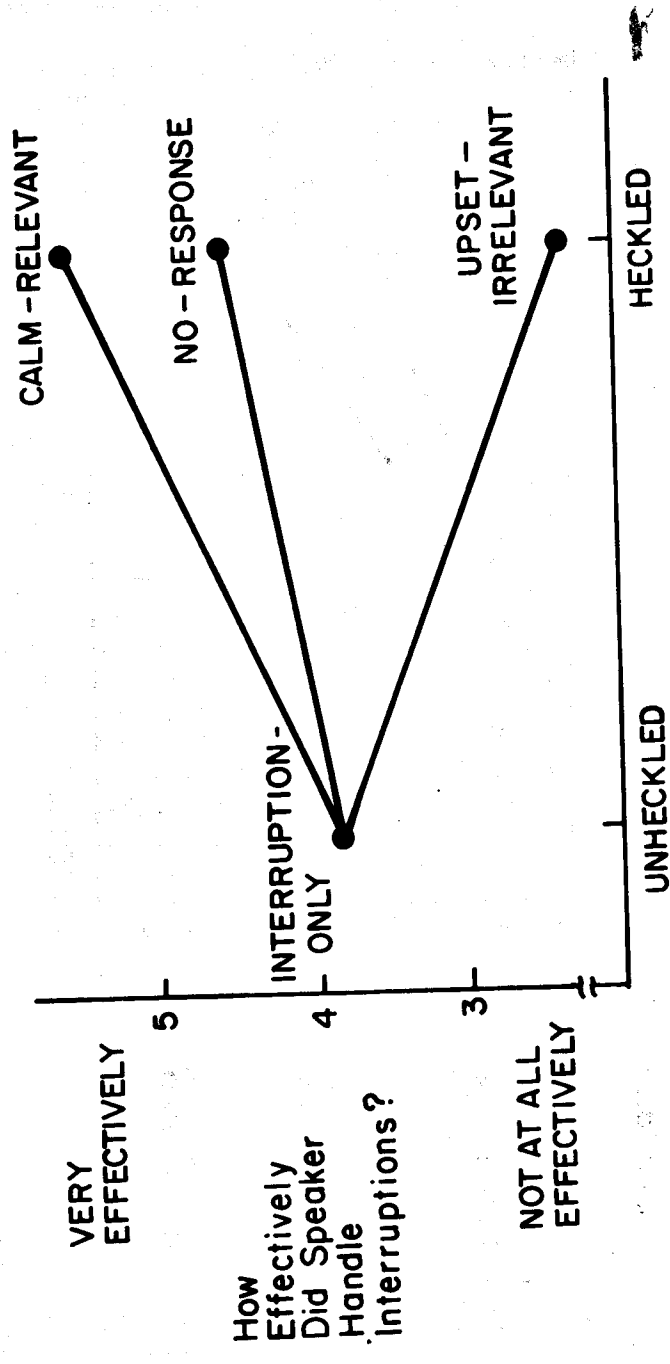


FIG. 2. Effect of responsiveness on perceptions of the speaker's ability to handle interruptions effectively (combined data for the two messages).

that subjects clearly rated the speaker as being disturbed by the interruptions in the interruption-only conditions ($\bar{X} = 5.56$). The no-response conditions ($\bar{X} = 3.60$) were rated as closer to the calm-relevant conditions than the upset-irrelevant conditions. Subjects rated the speaker as handling heckles in a significantly more effective manner in the calm-relevant conditions ($\bar{X} = 5.60$) than in the upset-irrelevant conditions ($\bar{X} = 2.31$; $F = 37.12$, $df = 1/95$, $p < .001$). Figure 2 shows that the interruption-only conditions ($\bar{X} = 3.84$) fell between the calm-relevant and upset-irrelevant conditions on this measure, and the no-response conditions ($\bar{X} = 4.60$) were seen as close to the calm-relevant conditions. (There is no data on these questions for subjects in the speech-only conditions, since there were no interruptions.) These questions, then, provide some evidence that the responsiveness manipulations were successful.

Finally, as evidence that the speeches did not differ in extraneous ways, univariate analyses of variance indicated that there were no significant differences between groups in subjects' ratings of the clarity of the speaker's delivery, or the extent to which she was nervous. There were no interactions between message type and response type on any of the manipulation checks.

Dependent Variables

The means and standard deviations of the dependent variables of interest are presented in Table 3 for the five pro-attitudinal groups, and in Table 4 for the five counter-attitudinal groups. Univariate analyses of variance indicated that there were no significant interactions between the two message types and the five response types on *any* of the dependent measures. The response variable had basically the same effect in both message conditions. In looking at the effect of the five different response conditions, the four comparisons of interest were any differences between conditions with heckling and those without heckling, between responding to the heckles and making no response, between responding in a calm-relevant manner and in an upset-irrelevant manner, and between the interruption-only and speech-only conditions. Since the manipulation of type of response showed the same pattern of results in both the pro- and counter-attitudinal speeches, the four contrasts of interest were made by examining the data for identical response conditions across the two messages. Thus, the means presented below are combined across both messages.

Because of problems in devising strictly orthogonal contrasts when cell frequencies are unequal, the Dunn multiple comparison procedure (Bonferroni t) was employed for the desired comparisons. The Dunn test yields a critical difference statistic (d critical) based on alpha, the degrees of freedom for

TABLE 3

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF DEPENDENT RATINGS OF SPEAKER
FOR FIVE RESPONSE CONDITIONS WITH THE PRO-ATTITUDINAL
SPEECH^a

Measure	Response condition				
	(12) Calm- relevant	(10) No- response	(14) Upset- irrelevant	(16) Interrup- tion-only	(10) Speech- only
Agree?					
\bar{x}	5.42	4.00	2.21	5.06	4.80
<i>SD</i>	.99	.94	1.36	1.18	1.75
Effort?					
\bar{x}	3.50	3.50	3.00	3.88	4.40
<i>SD</i>	1.88	1.71	2.03	1.82	1.50
Credible?					
\bar{x}	5.75	5.60	3.14	5.13	5.70
<i>SD</i>	.86	1.26	1.61	1.85	1.33
Persuasive?					
\bar{x}	4.33	4.20	2.43	3.75	4.60
<i>SD</i>	1.92	1.39	1.28	1.57	1.95
Sincere?					
\bar{x}	5.08	6.20	4.79	5.12	4.80
<i>SD</i>	1.37	.91	2.00	1.89	2.16
Like?					
\bar{x}	4.92	4.40	3.36	4.19	4.70
<i>SD</i>	1.24	1.95	1.94	2.07	1.94
Similar?					
\bar{x}	3.92	3.70	3.57	3.56	4.90
<i>SD</i>	2.10	1.70	1.82	1.41	1.28

Note.—Cell *n*'s are given in parentheses above response condition label.
^aRatings are on a 7-point scale with 7 being the positive end.

mean square error, and the number of comparisons made. Any observed contrast (*d* observed) which exceeds the *d* critical value can then be considered significant at the appropriate alpha level. On each dependent variable discussed below, four comparisons were made. The degrees of freedom for mean square error was 108.

From Figure 3, it can be seen that the hypothesis that any responding to the hecklers would produce more agreement with the speaker's recommendations than remaining silent was *not* confirmed. The data indicated

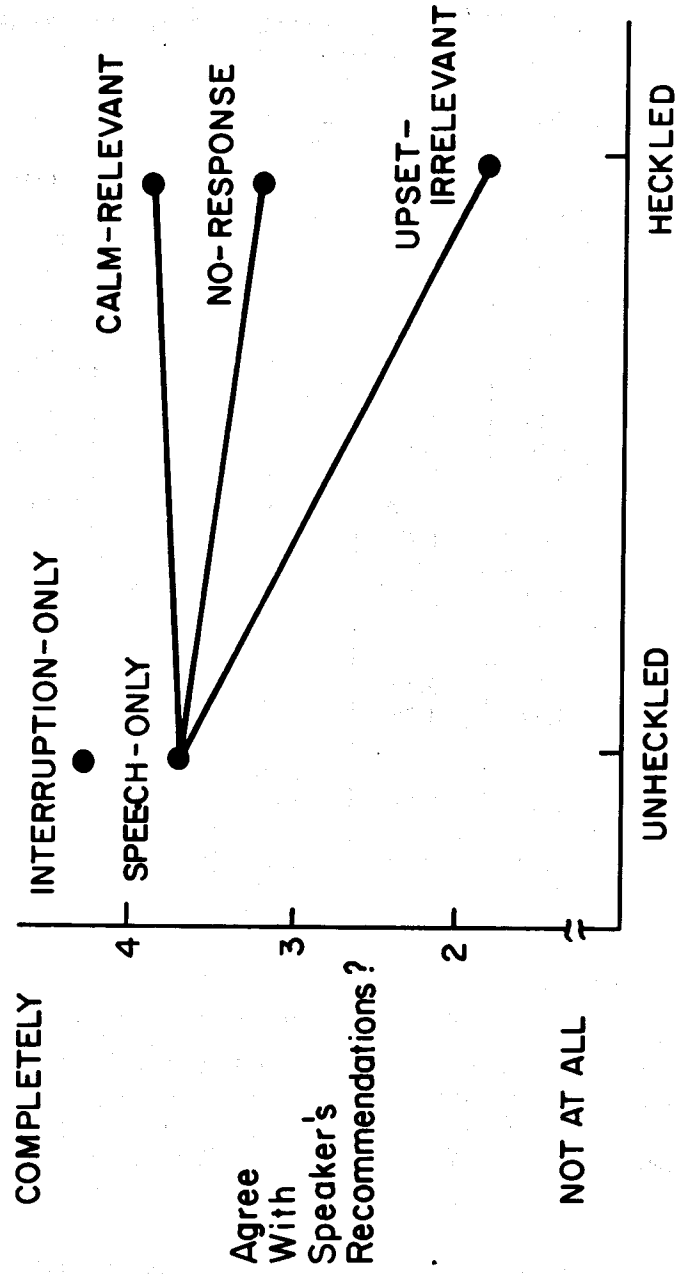


FIG. 3. Effect of responsiveness on agreement with the speaker (combined data for the two messages).

TABLE 4
 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF DEPENDENT RATINGS OF SPEAKER
 FOR FIVE RESPONSE CONDITIONS WITH THE COUNTER-ATTITUDINAL
 SPEECH^a

Measure	Response condition				
	(18) Calm- relevant	(10) No- response	(10) Upset- irrelevant	(9) Interrup- tion-only	(9) Speech- only
Agree?					
\bar{x}	2.67	2.00	1.50	2.56	2.56
<i>SD</i>	1.53	1.05	1.26	1.13	1.66
Effort?					
\bar{x}	3.56	3.90	1.80	3.44	4.11
<i>SD</i>	1.79	2.07	1.61	1.13	2.08
Credible?					
\bar{x}	3.89	3.90	3.30	4.40	4.67
<i>SD</i>	2.05	1.72	2.05	1.80	1.22
Persuasive?					
\bar{x}	3.11	3.20	2.30	2.89	3.44
<i>SD</i>	1.81	1.87	1.63	1.69	1.66
Sincere?					
\bar{x}	5.72	5.40	3.50	5.78	4.78
<i>SD</i>	1.27	1.26	2.36	1.20	1.98
Like?					
\bar{x}	4.94	4.20	2.20	4.56	4.44
<i>SD</i>	1.83	1.98	1.61	1.13	2.00
Similar?					
\bar{x}	2.28	2.50	1.60	3.00	3.22
<i>SD</i>	1.36	1.71	.84	1.32	1.48

Note.—Cell *n*'s are given in parentheses above response condition label.
^aRatings are on a 7-point scale with 7 being the positive end.

that the conditions with heckling ($\bar{X} = 2.96$) showed significantly less agreement with the speaker than conditions without heckling ($\bar{X} = 3.98$; d critical = 7.90, d observed = 9.34, $p < .05$).³ However, if heckling *did* occur, the calm-relevant response ($\bar{X} = 3.77$) was significantly superior to the upset-irrelevant response ($\bar{X} = 1.91$; d critical = 2.30, d observed = 4.38,

³ d observed was obtained using the means presented in Tables 3 and 4 (i.e., d observed = $2(5.42 + 4.00 + 2.21 + 2.67 + 2.00 + 1.50) - 3(5.06 + 4.80 + 2.56 + 2.56) = 9.34$).

$p < .01$) in producing agreement with the speaker. The speech-only conditions ($\bar{X} = 3.74$) did not differ significantly from the interruption-only conditions ($\bar{X} = 4.16$; d critical = 1.87, d observed = .26, $p > .10$). Also from Figure 3, it can be seen that the no-response condition ($\bar{X} = 3.00$) fell closer to the calm-relevant response condition than it did to the upset-irrelevant condition.

Other dependent measures attempted to measure subjects' perceptions of the effort exerted by the speaker, how much they liked her, how similar they felt to her, and how persuasive, credible, and sincere she appeared. The speech-only and interruption-only conditions did not differ significantly on any of these measures.

Two questions were employed to measure the amount of effort exerted by the speaker: One, whether the speaker exerted an "extra effort" to make his positions known; the other, if the speaker exerted an "extra effort" to establish good relations with the audience. Neither question showed significant differences between groups. Nevertheless, there was a strong tendency for subjects to see the speaker as exerting less effort to establish good relations with the audience when she responded with an upset-irrelevant reply ($\bar{X} = 2.50$) than when she responded with a calm-relevant ($\bar{X} = 3.53$; d critical = 2.28, d observed = 2.28, $p = .10$). Across all cells, rated effort of the speaker to establish good relations with the audience produced a significant correlation of .24 with agreement ($p < .05$).

The speaker was rated as significantly less credible in the heckled conditions ($\bar{X} = 4.20$) than in the unheckled conditions ($\bar{X} = 5.02$; d critical = 8.49, d observed = 8.54, $p < .05$). Likewise, the speaker was seen as less credible when she responded with an upset-irrelevant reply ($\bar{X} = 3.20$) than when she responded with a calm-relevant reply ($\bar{X} = 4.63$; d critical = 2.46, d observed = 3.20, $p < .01$). The speaker was also rated as less persuasive (d critical = 2.39, d observed = 2.71, $p < .05$) and less sincere (d critical = 2.41, d observed = 2.51, $p < .05$) when she responded in an upset-irrelevant manner than when she responded in a calm-relevant manner. Across all 10 cells, rated credibility and persuasiveness each showed a correlation of .21 with agreement ($p < .05$). Sincerity showed a .25 correlation with agreement ($p < .05$).

Finally, subjects reported feeling somewhat more similar to the speaker in the unheckled ($\bar{X} = 3.68$) than in the heckled conditions ($\bar{X} = 2.92$; d critical = 8.25, d observed = 8.90, $p < .10$), and liked the speaker more when she responded with a calm-relevant reply ($\bar{X} = 4.93$) than when she responded with an upset-irrelevant reply ($\bar{X} = 2.87$; d critical = 3.16, d observed = 4.30, $p < .01$). The overall within cells correlation between similarity and liking on the one hand, and agreement, on the other, was .36 ($p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

Clearly, the hypothesis that responding would produce more agreement with the speaker than remaining silent was incorrect. The data indicated,

however, that the type of response made is actually quite important. The calm-relevant response is consistently superior to the upset-irrelevant response on all dependent measures for both the pro- and counter-attitudinal speeches. This might be most simply explained by the data on credibility. Heckling, by itself, could indicate to the audience that there is another point of view to that of the speaker; and when the speaker responds in an irrelevant manner, it could indicate that the speaker has no answer to the objection raised by the hecklers. This decrease in credibility might account for the reduction in agreement with the speaker when heckling is present, and the further reduction in agreement with the speaker when an upset-irrelevant response is made.

What about the commodity theory (Brock, 1968) explanation? The first effort question on the speaker's "extra effort to make his positions known," showed no meaningful differences between groups, while the second question on "extra effort to establish good relations with the audience" did produce a difference in a direction that is consistent with a commodity interpretation. There were no significant differences in agreement or in effort between the unheckled speech-only and interruption-only conditions. On the other hand, when heckling did occur, the audience tended to perceive the calm-relevant response as more effortful than the upset-irrelevant response. Recall that these conditions differed significantly in rated agreement with the speaker in the same direction. However, since both effort questions were insensitive, a commodity theory explanation of the heckling results would appear to be unpromising.

The results of this study might be viewed from a different theoretical point of view. White (1959) used the term *effectance motivation* to characterize an organism's need to interact effectively with the environment. While White emphasized aspects of the motive which attempted to explain why organisms avoided the monotonous and familiar and actively sought stimulation, Byrne and Clore (1967) argued that "the same motivational construct which accounts for a preference for stimulation also accounts for a negative response to stimuli which lie further along the continuum of unfamiliarity, unpredictability, and unexpectedness" (p. 3). Byrne and Clore further postulate that if the stimulus events are sufficiently unfamiliar or unpredictable, they will arouse some distress. Heckling is an unexpected, unpredictable stimulus which may arouse distress. In fact, a former White House official told the *Washington Post* that the (former) President's hatred of demonstrators "all goes back to Mr. Nixon's problem with having the unexpected happen. His staff learns to go to any length to protect him from something for which he is not prepared" (*Washington Post*, June 26, 1973, p. A14).

When heckling occurs, not only might a speaker become distressed, but many in the audience as well may not know what to do or how to respond. Some undoubtedly feel uneasy, anxious, or uncomfortable. Lombardo, Weiss, and Stich (1973) recently demonstrated that an unpleasant drive state could be reduced by a verbal reply, and could lead to attraction to the person who is associated with the reduction of the drive. It seems possible that in the calm-relevant condition, the speaker, by responding in a confident, cool manner, reduced this audience uneasiness, and thus produced favorable attitudes toward herself and her topic. In the no-response condition, the hecklers may have produced some discomfort, and so the ratings of the speaker in this condition are somewhat reduced. Finally, in the upset-irrelevant condition, it seems possible that the speaker, by becoming upset, instead of decreasing audience uneasiness, actually increased it; not only were the hecklers unpredictable, but so was the speaker. *How* upset would she get? The audience in this condition rated the speaker as handling the interruptions much less effectively than in the calm-relevant condition; only an effective response to the heckles could reduce audience distress. For this explanation to be convincing, a measure of how uncomfortable or uneasy the subjects became as a result of the heckles and the speaker's response would have been helpful.

The most striking finding of this study was that in both pro- and counter-attitudinal speeches, two different types of responding produced large differences on several measures. Though the results indicated that across both speeches and on *all* measures, the calm-relevant response was viewed more favorably than the upset-irrelevant response, the pattern for the no-response condition was not so consistent. On one measure (how disturbed the speaker was), the no-response condition was seen as close to the upset-irrelevant condition, but on most other measures, no-response was seen as closer to the calm-relevant condition. When the speaker makes a response to the hecklers, the audience has some basis for making an attribution about the speaker; but when the speaker makes no response, and the audience has no prior information about dispositional attributes of the speaker, it is more difficult to make an attribution. The speaker may not be responding because she is trying to be polite, or because she doesn't know the answer, or is a snob, or is scared, etc. This particular point—that some information is needed to make an attribution—is a key point in the person perception literature (Hastorf, Schneider, & Polefka, 1970; Jones & Davis, 1965). In this study, it seems that since there was no good information on which to base an attribution in the no-response condition, subjects gave the speaker the benefit of the doubt. In real life settings, however, as in political speeches, the audience often has prior knowledge about the speaker and may make quite different attributions, if the

speaker does not respond, depending on their prior knowledge, or on the particular situation.

Heckling is a fact of life in the political process and in other important arenas. To date there is no empirical evidence for the view that heckling can enhance support for a speaker's position. Perhaps the most interesting and most practical finding of this study is the demonstration of how effective heckling can be as a strategy. Even when the speaker responded in a calm-relevant manner to the hecklers, she was only slightly better off in terms of audience agreement than when there was no heckling. Thus, it seems that the worst a heckler can do is to have no overall effect if the speaker deals with the heckling calmly and relevantly, and at best he can harm the speaker's persuasiveness if no response, or an upset-irrelevant response, is made.

In summary, if all else is equal, *what* the speaker says (relevant or irrelevant) or *how* he responds (calm or upset) to audience heckles can have a substantial impact on overall audience agreement with his message. Perceived effort, reduction of audience uneasiness by a speaker's reply, speaker credibility, perceived similarity, and liking for the speaker may be some of the influential processes. Future studies which examine the precise factors that make up an effective or ineffective response to an audience heckle, and examine as well whether or not the hecklers are perceived as members of the audience ingroup, should be beneficial in illuminating the underlying processes.

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