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DEFENDING JUDGE ROY MOORE: A CASE STUDY OF PERSUASION
RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

By

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B.A., University of Louisville, 2016

A Thesis
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the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
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A Thesis Approved On

April 22, 2021

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ABSTRACT

DEFENDING JUDGE ROY MOORE: A CASE STUDY OF PERSUASION RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

Stephen Brockman

April 22, 2021

This study explored what kind of persuasive resistance strategies people used when faced with information that was contrary to their existing belief system. A typology of resistance strategies as articulated by Fransen, Smit, & Verlegh (2015), was used to guide the development of a coding system. I coded the public quotes of supporters of a political candidate after sexual misconduct allegations came to light. The first research question investigated was: What kinds of persuasion resistance strategies were Roy Moore supporters most likely to use? The second was: What kinds of persuasion resistance strategies used tended to co-occur? The most important result of this exploratory study was showing that not only do people think about the resistance strategies they are going to use, but they also verbalize them. People mentally process contesting information, then give them a voice. Empowering strategies emerged as a particularly important persuasion resistance strategy in the current study. A larger study could try to find ways to encourage people to explore the facts of a given situation by anticipating (probability) the resistance responses and dealing with them in naturally occurring contexts.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Despite great efforts of rhetoricians and persuasion researchers to perfect our understanding of persuasion, obtaining substantial change in an individual's values, beliefs and attitudes is rather difficult to achieve. This paper will focus on the strategies that people use to resist a message that does not conform with their existing belief system. In current culture, I hear common laments about the advent of social media. Everyone suddenly has a voice and traditional forms of persuasion have been replaced by propaganda in all its forms. Why are some people no longer interested in the truth? Why don't certain individuals take the time to fact check what they hear and read?

One early effort to explain the difficulty in changing a person's attitude and beliefs was articulated by Sherif (1965) social judgement theory. This theory studies an individual's judgment. Social judgment theory is concerned with how the internal procedures of an individual affect their own judgment related to a communicated message (Sherif, 1965). A judgment occurs when an individual compares a minimum of two stimuli and then chooses one of them. With respect to social stimuli the judgment processes incorporate both past and present experiences Sherif (1965) explained attitudes as "the stands the individual upholds and cherishes about objects, issues, persons, groups, or institutions." (p. 4).

Sherif (1965) speculated that individuals who are exceedingly involved in an issue are more likely to appraise all possible positions. People who have a deep apprehension or extreme opinions regardless of which side of the argument they choose to defend will tend to reject an argument because they have already developed a strong opinion on the subject. This will make the likelihood of a person changing their mind

much less likely. According to the social judgment theory people who are highly involved in a given subject are far less likely to be persuaded to change their beliefs. In contrast, people who don't care or know little about a given subject are more likely to be open to considering other opinions or ideas.

Ego involvement is the position or significance of an issue to an individual's personal life which is frequently established by association in a group with similar beliefs. Those who researched social judgment theory surmised that a deep level of ego involvement is associated with a wide latitude of rejection. The level of ego involvement is contingent upon whether the subject at hand "arouses an intense attitude or, rather, whether the individual can regard the issue with some detachment as primarily a 'factual' matter" (p. 191). Politics is one area where ego involvement is prevalent because of the firmly entrenched ideas individuals have on various political issues. These ideas and attitudes begin to become part of an individual's self-identity, making any attempts to change a person's attitude who is in this frame of mind difficult.

Kunda (1990) proposed that reasoning is often heavily influenced by motivation: primed to reach a particular outcome such as to confirm what one already knows or believes (i.e., confirmation bias). This happens because motivation activates a set of cognitive processes that prime the person to find a particular pattern via how they access, assemble, and evaluate beliefs. In other words, people often process information to support a preordained conclusion rather than engage in an open search for the most rationally justified conclusion (Kunda, 1990).

On many occasions, people are motivated to assess information dispassionately and to arrive at an accurate conclusion, but there are also many occasions in which

individuals are motivated to reach or support a predetermined outcome (Kruglanski, 1980; Kruglanski & Ajzen, 1983; Kruglanski & Klar, 1987). Although both categories are discussed together because they are both indicative of motivated reasoning, the strategies are different. Accuracy objectives use the beliefs and strategies considered most likely to achieve an unbiased result. Conversely, directional goals often motivate individuals to arrive at a specific conclusion or to justify their preferred conclusion (Kunda, 1990).

Accuracy-driven reasoning proposes that people who are motivated to be accurate use more cognitive effort on issue-related reasoning, digest the material more carefully and process it more intensely using additional and complex rules (Simon, 1957). Decision makers form objectives by how good the alternative is in reaching their goals and thus will quit searching once they reach the one that satisfies their goals (Stigler, 1961). People are aware of the effort-accuracy trade-off by considering both the cost and benefits of their information gathering (Beach & Mitchell, 1978; Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1988).

Several studies (Kruglanski and Freund 1983; Freund, Kruglanski, & Shpitzajzen, 1985) have shown that with the possibility that a person's accuracy of a particular subject is going to be analyzed, people tend to be more thoughtful and less prone to fundamental attribution error (personal bias). The studies done to measure accuracy-motivated reasoning appears to be quite strong. In each case the conclusions reached by the participants were supposed to be the most accurate available without preferring one conclusion over the other. Evidence shows that people are more careful when their accuracy is being evaluated.

Accuracy-motivated research was also shown to limit but not eliminate several kinds of biases. (Fischhoff, 1977; Kahneman & Tversky, 1972a; Lord, Lepper, & Preston, 1984; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). This is the result of people processing information carefully and deeply not relying on just the beginning or end of the research being accessed. People who are motivated to be accurate use more stringent rules and strategies when assessing information that is more appropriate (Kunda, 1990).

In contrast, people operating with directional or biased processing seek enough evidence to create an "illusion of objectivity." People may also imaginatively combine accessed knowledge to create new beliefs that could also support their desired conclusion. (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; cf. Kruglanski, 1980). Kunda (1990) acknowledges that people are usually unaware of the degree to which their processing of information is biased. Kunda (1990) also notes that attitude change can occur when newly constructed positive beliefs based on the introduction of new information has changed the individual's recollection of past beliefs.

Burscheid (1976) found that people tend to generate more positive impressions from information about a person if they expect to meet and interact with them than when they have no such expectation. This indicates that people form biased beliefs about people they meet based on expectations of likeability (Kunda, 1990). The bias of an upcoming event occurs when an individual seeks out events that are pleasing and therefore more important than events that are not considered to be pleasing. This is clarified nicely by a study of people that were diagnosed with having a fictitious disease. (Ditto, et al., 1988; Jemmott, et al., 1986). Those having the disease questioned the legitimacy of the test result, while those testing negative considered the testing process to

be valid. Similarly, smokers were found to be less likely to believe scientific proof that smoking is bad for one's health (Kunda, 1990).

Most communicators assume that attitude and belief conflicts between individuals can be resolved by providing more information. In a study by Kahan (2012) found that providing more quality information will induce the other party to change their opinions. Kahan hypothesized that political partisans receiving more information would widen rather than narrow belief and value conflicts. Kahan (2012) proposed that in such circumstances, people process information to protect their identity defining beliefs. According to identity protection cognition theory people ignore, dismiss, or eliminate information that threatens their identities.

Kahan (2012) pointed out that there are significant social costs in altering identities that are central to maintaining social relationships and social networks: change your political or religious beliefs and your relationships may suffer. In a study Kahan (2013) found that participants who had good math skills tended to assess empirical relationships correctly when presented with quantitative information about a medical experiment. However, when presented with similar data about the effectiveness of gun control laws, people who were high in math skill assimilated the information to match their closely held personal beliefs. On controversial topics, people with advanced math skills did little better than their less numerate compatriots incorrectly interpreting the numerical results (Kahan, et al., 2013). Clearly, there are other motivational components at work in addition to a desire for accuracy.

Fransen et al. (2015) developed a typology that links defensive motivations and persuasion resistance. They identified four groups of resistance strategies: avoidance,

contesting, biased processing, and empowerment. These strategies were hypothesized to relate to three different motivations for resisting persuasion: threat to freedom, reluctance to change, and concerns of deception.

Threat to freedom

Threats to freedom can best be explained by first looking at the reactance theory which accepts the notion that people have a natural desire for autonomy and independence. In other words, people do not like being told what to do or what to believe. Threat to freedom arouse resistance in the form of reactance. When people feel that their freedom is threatened, they are motivated to maintain and restore the threatened opinion or behavior (Brehm and Brehm, 1981). Threats to freedom can be avoided by communicating in a manner that gives a person freedom of choice (Worchel, Brehm, 1970; Buller, et al., 2000). Being civil and offering ideas in a provisional manner are good way to get people to listen to opposing views (Brown, 1987). Even if this strategy is employed there is no guarantee it will persuade others to change their beliefs (Fransen et al., 2015).

Resistance to Change

The second major motivation to resist persuasion is fear of change, especially as it relates to one's important identities or central beliefs and values. Resistance to change often accompanies a person's comfort maintaining views and behaviors that feel natural (Steinburg, 1992). "Change consists of going from the known to the unknown" (Steinburg, 1992) and this can cause a person to sense a loss of control over their situation which causes resistance (Conner, 1992). People are resistant to change because of a wish to stay the same. People can resist change for fear of losing something they

value; the argument for change does not make sense, changing is perceived to have more risks than benefits. A person can resist change simply because they are happy with their existing condition (Hultman, 1995; Kotter, Schlesinger, 2008). Research has shown that dogmatic individuals exhibit cognitive inflexibility and therefore struggle in a new situation (Lau and Woodman, 1995). Other research also suggests that resistance to change is closely tied to a person's core values and any attempt to change the beliefs that people hold in the highest importance will be rejected (Hofstede, 1980).

There is a line of work in cultural cognition that substantiates that people protect their cultural worldview. Mary Douglas (1990) provided one parsimonious scheme for classifying an individual's "cultural worldview." They are fragmented into hierarchy-egalitarianism" and "individualism-communitarianism." People who subscribe to a "hierarchical" worldview believe that rights, duties, goods, and offices should be disseminated differentially and based on well-defined and fixed social characteristics (e.g., gender, wealth, lineage, and ethnicity) (Braman, et al., 2007). Those who subscribe to an "egalitarian" worldview trust that rights, duties, goods, and offices should be dispersed equally and without regard to such characteristics (Braman et al., 2007). People who subscribe to a "communitarian" worldview trust that societal interests should take precedence over individual ones and that society should accept the responsibility for guarding the conditions of individual prospering (Braman et al., 2007). Those who subscribe to an "individualistic" worldview believe that individuals should secure the conditions of their own flourishing without shared interference or assistance (Braman et al., 2007). Egalitarians and communitarians tend to worry about environmental risks. Individualists reject claims of environmental risk exactly because

they value markets and private orderings (Braman et al., 2007). With respect to the current case study, the communitarian worldview is the predominant one that Christian evangelicals such as Roy Moore espouse.

Concern for Deception

Fransen et al. (2015) also identify concerns about deception as a third motivation that drives active resistance to persuasion. For instance, Drake and Ritchie (2007) found that individuals who are concerned about being deceived will contest the source of a message or derogate the source. A study by Zuwerink and Cameron (2003) asked people to write essays about how they would handle a convincing challenge. The study revealed that source derogation and counterarguments were the most used counterstrategies. In political spheres, source derogation was found to be a strategy that individuals used to refute messages from opposing candidates. In a study of political credibility, Pfau & Burgoon (1988) found that source derogation was the most frequent response to messages from candidates who opposed their position.

Motivations to resist persuasion can be manifested in many ways. In an effort to identify and understand the motivation to resist persuasion, it is important to develop strategies that can be used in avoidance. Each resistance motivation uses a specific strategy to achieve the goal of avoidance which will be identified in the following section. It is important to note that some strategies can be used in more than one of the motivations to resist persuasion.

Strategies for Resisting Persuasion

In their review of the resistance to persuasion literature, Fransen et al. (2015) identified four broad categories of resistance to persuasion strategies, Avoidance,

Contesting, Biased processing, and Empowerment. Avoidance is perhaps the most direct strategy people use to shield themselves from the impact of persuasive messages (Fransen et al. 2015). Research has been done in marketing to see what type of avoidance strategies consumers use when it comes to commercials. People can shun unwanted information by *physical avoidance*, which would be leaving the room to avoid hearing a commercial on television, *mechanical avoidance* which would be fast-forwarding through ads or changing channels when a commercial comes on (Brodan, 2007); or *cognitive avoidance* which is simply ignoring or not paying attention to a commercial (Drèze & Hussherr, 2007). Although these studies focus on commercials, the same logic can be used when the message directly refutes a person's political or religious beliefs.

Studies in political and health communication have identified “selective exposure” or “selective avoidance” as strategies to block out a message that is contradictory to their own belief system (Freedman & Sears, 1965; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). Cognitive dissonance theory looks at this behavior as a way of lowering the disagreement individuals experience due to various contradictions in the information received (Festinger, 1957). People who smoke will avoid information that confirms that smoking is dangerous to their health. Instead, they will search for information that provides reasons that smoking is not a serious health risk. Non-smokers engage in totally opposite behavior (Brock & Balloun 1967). The connection between cognitive dissonance and selective exposure has been examined in many studies over the years (Fransen et al.,2015). A meta-analysis of these studies found that cognitive dissonance and selective exposure seem to occur more readily in individuals with strong opinions (Freedman and Sears, 1965; Frey, 1986; D’Alessio & Allen, 2007; Hart, et al.,

2007).

Contesting strategies resist persuasion by derogating the content and or the source of the message. Any persuasive tactics that are used in the message will also come under attack (Fransen et al., 2015). Contesting the content is a behavior in which individuals study the persuasive message and look for inconsistencies that can be used in a counterargument thereby decreasing the effectiveness of the message. People will look for areas of the persuasive message that can be countered by an argument that includes and reinforces the person's attitudes and beliefs (Wright, 1973). If the intent of a persuasive message is known in advance, people will use that time to gather information they can use to dispute it (Wood and Quinn, 2003). Recent research has shown that the use of counterarguments to refute narratives is less effective because the intentions of the message are not usually clear. However, that can change if the intent of the narrative is revealed not to align with the individual's belief system (Moyer-Gusé, Nabi, 2011; Niederdeppe, et al., 2012).

Contesting the source (source derogation) involves dismissing the trustworthiness of the source of the conflicting message (Abelson, Miller, 1967; Zuwerink, Jacks, & Cameron, 2003). Early research proposed that source derogation was a communication tactic used to reduce the effectiveness of the persuasive message (Anderson, 1967). Later studies have shown that source derogation is a cognitive reaction to the persuasive efforts. Source derogation requires less effort than a counterargument because it focuses its rebuttal on a single person or cue (Wright, 1973, 1975). Negative stereotyping can be used in source derogation to attack the sender and the contents of the intimidating message in hopes of reducing the effectiveness of both (Sinclair, Kunda, 1999)

According to the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) people develop resistance to forms of persuasion over time based on their exposure to various marketing techniques that they feel are being used to trick them (Friestad & Wright, 1994). People know the technique used in marketing to persuade them and therefore react negatively to correct the attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994) Contesting the source in this manner has been studied and it has raised the possibility that the process is automatic and unconscious and can begin in early childhood (Buijzen, Van Reijmersdal, & Owen, 2010).

There are three biased information processing strategies: *weighting attributes*, *reducing impact* and *optimism bias* (Ahluwalia, 2000). When using biased processing strategies people will process a message in a manner that conforms to their attitudes and behaviors or decreases the significance of the conflicting message. Clinton supporters used the weighing attributes strategy during the Clinton/Monica Lewinsky controversy (Ahluwalia, 2000). After their affair was made public Clinton supporters put more importance on intelligence and strong leadership as desirable personality traits necessary to people in public office. At the same time the group put less importance on traits such as trustworthiness and morality (Fransen et al., 2015). This biased strategy made the affair less important and forgivable in the minds of people that would continue to support Clinton. When using a strategy to “reduce the impact” loyal customers of a certain brand will only focus on a single negative message that may come up it will not affect their overall attitude towards the brand (Fransen et al., 2015). Conversely, people who are not as loyal will experience "spill over" which will affect their overall view of the brand negatively (Ahluwalia, 2000).

Optimism bias is a strategy used to distort the influence of inconsistent information. This resistance strategy is mainly associated in the framework of health information. It is proposed that individuals faced with negative outcomes downplay the probability that the negative occurrence will happen them (Weinstein, 1987; Sharot, Kom, & Dolan, 2011; Sheppard, et al., 1987). The result is a tendency to soften the risks or overstate the perception of their own ability to control the situation (Chambers & Windschitl, 2004). An example of this strategy is a person who drinks alcohol heavily and has an unhealthy diet but believes they are not going to suffer any health issues as a result. They rationalize this belief by stating that they have friends who share similar lifestyles without major health concerns.

Empowerment strategies are used by people to strengthen their current belief systems to make themselves less vulnerable to outside persuasive attempts. They include *attitude bolstering*, *social validation*, and *self-assertion* (Fransen et al., 2015). Attitude bolstering is a process by which people generate thoughts that are in keeping with their prevailing beliefs. When exposed to a conflicting belief people will not counter or contest the message but will instead remind themselves of all the reasons why they believe this way in the first place (Abelson, 1959; Lydon, Zanna, & Ross, 1988). Social validation is a way people can reaffirm their attitudes and beliefs by seeking out others with similar beliefs when confronted with a counter persuasive message (Zuwerink, et al., 2003). This confirms the person's current behaviors and makes them less vulnerable to the negative message (Axsom, Yates, & Chaiken, 1987). Self-assertions are techniques used by people who possess high levels of self-esteem to avoid messages that do not fit into their belief system. These people feel very confident that their beliefs are right and are not

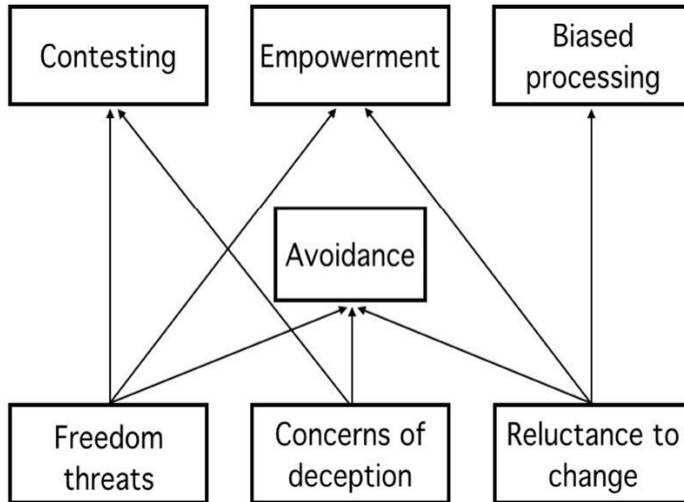
interested in changing them (Zuwerink, et al., 2003).

The three motivations of resistance all lead to one to resist a discrepant persuasive message. However, the choice of which resistance strategy an individual uses in different contexts differs and therefore must be studied to identify how particular motivations line align with the use of resistance strategies. Having discussed the resistance strategies, it is now time to show which resistance strategies apply to the three motivations to resist persuasion.

How Motivations Resist Persuasion Affect Resistance Strategies

In their integrative literature review, Fransen et al (2015) developed a set of theoretical propositions for how specific motivations to resist persuasion affect persuasion resistance strategy choice. These strategies are summarized in Figure 1 below. This exploratory study does not test the links between motivation and strategy usage. This study is merely a necessary precursor to building a coding system that can operationalize the strategies and add resistance strategies to the list that are not currently incorporated.

Figure 1: Motivations to Resist Persuasion X Resistance Strategies Used.



Avoidance strategies may be triggered by any of the three motivations (threat to freedom, reluctance to change, and concerns of deception) (Fransen et al., 2015). The chart (fig. 1) depicts Fransen et al.'s (2015) predictions of how persuasion resistance motivations relate to each strategy type. These predictions do not specify which strategies are likely to be utilized within each of these four categories. As shown (Fig 1) each motivation is linked to the use of avoidance strategies. Motivation to preserve freedom or noninterference is linked to the use of contesting and empowerment strategies. Concerns about being deceived is linked to contesting. Reluctance to change uses empowerment and biased processing because the subgroups in each can be used to avoid the message whereas the contesting subgroup would not.

CHAPTER II: DEFENDING ROY MOORE

Political Background

Roy Moore is an Alabama judge turned politician who has had a colorful and controversial history. He became a cultural warrior in the eyes of many Christian evangelicals for his ongoing efforts to promote Christian civic culture. He began his crusade in 2001 when as the Attorney of Alabama, he had a 10-ton monument containing the Ten Commandments positioned outside Alabama Supreme Court building (Faulk, 2017). A federal judge in November 2002 ordered to have the monument removed after a lawsuit against its presence was won in federal court. Moore refused to have the monument removed after losing an appeal in July 2003 and was removed from the bench in November 2003 (Faulk, 2017)

Roy Moore ran for governor of Alabama in 2006 but failed to get the Republican nomination losing to sitting Governor Bob Riley. Moore only got 33% of the vote in the primary and refused to call Riley and concede. Moore still had his Christian base supporting him remembering his stand on the Ten Commandments in 2003 (Rawls, 2007) During his campaign Moore called for GOP Chairman Twinkle Cavanaugh to resign for favoring Gov. Riley, she did not comply. Moore also criticized President George W. Bush for complimenting Gov. Riley. These events did not enhance his chance of winning his party's nomination (Rawls, 2007). Moore pursued his party's nomination for governor again in 2010 but came in fourth receiving only 19% of the vote (Governor, 2010).

In 2017 Roy Moore ran as a candidate for United States Senate in a special election. This was to fill the remainder of the term of Jeff Sessions Senate seat. Sessions had resigned to become President Trump's Attorney General. Moore had a strong following among predominantly white evangelicals during his runoff against fellow Republican Luther Strange leading up to the primary vote in September 2017. Moore and his evangelical supporters have long complained about religious persecution stating that they are not properly represented in society or the government (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2017). They provide the passing of laws on same-sex marriage, abortion, and school prayer as evidence of their persecution and has led to the moral disintegration of American society (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2017).

A list of 50 pastors who supported Moore was printed in August 2017 a month before the primary. In addition to the pastor list, endorsements came in from nationally prominent evangelical leaders such as "James Dobson (Focus on Family), Bob Vander Plaats (The Family Leader), and Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage" (Wilson, 2017). Moore soundly defeated Strange in the September 2017 runoff setting the stage for his December 12th faceoff against Democrat Doug Jones (Faulk, 2017).

Scandal

Moore had an eight-point lead over Jones in opinion polls before the Washington Post on November 5, 2017 published accusations by four women who claimed that in the early 1980s Moore pursued them when they were teenagers (McCrummen, Reinhard, Crites, 2017). Leigh Corfman claimed she was 14 years old when first approached by Moore. The relationship according to Corfman included Moore touching her

inappropriately while she was partially undressed. Gadsden Mall was 16 when Moore asked her for a date and Debbie Wesson Gibson reported that she had several dates with Moore when she was 17 years old (McCrummen et al., 2017). Moore's troubles in November continued when he appeared to contradict himself during a radio interview with Fox News pundit Sean Hannity. First Moore unequivocally denied the Washington Post allegations but later stated that he never dated anyone without the consent of their parents. This was followed by the addition of three more accusers claiming sexual misconduct by Moore (Faulk, 2017).

In the wake of these explosive allegations, the personal reputations of the pastors and religious figures who had endorsed Roy Moore were threatened. In addition, the Moore campaign republished the list of support Moore had received from religious leaders on November 13, 2017 (Anapol, 2017) The Moore campaign implied that the original list of pastors supporting Moore's campaign continued to support him. They had not, however, re-contacted the pastors to determine if they still supported Roy Moore in the aftermath of the published allegations (Eltagouri, 2017). Several pastors said they had no idea they were on the original list. Pastor Joseph Smith for example stated he never gave his permission to be on any list (Guzman, 2017).

The media began to press the pastors on the list as to whether they still endorsed Roy Moore in his Senate bid. The online news source Splinter an online news source ran a story on November 17, 2019, showing the results of their attempt to reach all 50 pastors on the list. Only 18 pastors went on record showing their continued support for Moore. Thirty of the pastors on the list did not respond (McDonough, Chang, Roller, 2018). Prominent religious leaders like Jerry Falwell Jr, the President of Liberty University,

said, "It comes down to a question of who is more credible in the eyes of the voters — the candidate or the accuser, and I believe the judge is telling the truth." Falwell believed the judge over his accusers (Ballesteros, 2017). Dr. James Dobson, the originator of the Focus on the Family broadcasts and a conservative evangelical leader, was quoted saying he still supported Moore: "I've known Judge Moore for over 25 years, and I know him to be a man of proven character and integrity" (Gattis, 2017). Moore ultimately lost a close race to Doug Jones in the December 12, 2017 runoff. Jones became the first Democrat elected to the Senate in Alabama in 25 years (Backus & De Pinto, 2017).

Reasons to Study Roy Moore Supporters

The Roy Moore campaign provided an ideal opportunity to investigate how people deal with information that endangers their existing beliefs, attitudes, and worldview. The personal reputations of public religious figures who endorsed Roy Moore were on the line. Their reputations as religious leaders were on the line, and in subsequent weeks after the revelations, they would be asked by media and others whether they still endorsed Moore and if they did, they would be asked to justify their continued endorsement. The statements made before and after the sexual allegations were made clearly show that only a few religious leaders changed their support for Moore. The chain of events of shows what resistant strategies Moore followers used to evade or ignore persuasion.

The data that was compiled and analyzed was a matter of public record. All the statements made by Moore supporters (not denied) have been verified by multiple media sources or have been recorded on video. Statements at several press conferences provided rich material to analyze how religious leaders, as well as lay evangelicals, accounted for

their continued public endorsement of Roy Moore considering the serious accusations against him. People are quite resilient in defending their beliefs against contradictory evidence in part because they are highly motivated to do so (Kunda, 1990). The case study extends this research by providing an initial inquiry as to the kinds of accounts that people communicate to defend their “endangered beliefs.”

For this study the research questions were:

RQ1 What kinds of persuasion resistant strategies were Roy Moore supporters most likely to use?

RQ2 What kinds of persuasion resistant strategies used tended to co-occur?

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This is an exploratory study in which the descriptive findings, rather than predictions, are of primary interest. I used public statements of Roy Moore supporters as a case study of strategies used to resist persuasion in the aftermath of accusations of inappropriate behavior. Large numbers of people continued to endorse Roy Moore publicly after the Washington Post story broke about Moore's alleged relationships with minor girls. Members of the press attempted to contact and get reactions from as many of Moore's endorsers as they possibly could that were willing to speak on the record. Many of the individuals that continued to support Moore spoke on his behalf at two press conferences organized by his wife Kayla. This was a good case to study because of the public availability of quotes and original source materials.

Sampling Procedures

I did a search for statements by self-identified Christian pastors and evangelical leaders who had previously endorsed Roy Moore or took it upon themselves to make public statements in the days following the publication of the Washington Post stories. In the case of public statements, they were specifically called upon to provide support for Roy Moore in their roles as Christian leaders. I looked for material about those who still supported Moore after the November 9, 2017, Washington Post story about sexual allegations was published. Here is a description of what I found. Splinter ran a story on November 17, 2019, showing the results of their attempt to contact the Moore supporters on the list of 154 to see if they had changed their minds. A total of 40 supporters gave on

the record statements about why they continued to support Moore. The “press conference” in Birmingham on November 16, 2017, was put together by Kayla Moore and organized by Janet Porter lasted over an hour and a half. A total of 19 people provided statements of support for Moore. On December 10, 2017, Frank Lutz VICE News Tonight on HBO interviewed 12 conservative voters from Alabama that continued to support Moore and commented on the allegations.

Several other media outlets provided coverage of quotes, public statements, and interviews including a CNN segment interviewing potential voters in Birmingham AL. on December 3, 2017. A Moore Rally on December 11, 2017, in Midland City, Alabama was reported by the Washington Post. Interviews with Moore supporters on PIGN news after the Women for Moore Press Conference on Nov 29, 2017, in Montgomery AL. Excerpts Women's Rally for Moore in Montgomery AL. on November 17, 2017, by ABC and Al Jazeera interviews from Gadsden and Woodstock Alabama on December 11, 2017. All quotes were transcribed resulting in 53 pages of textual quotes.

Coding Procedures

To begin the process of putting together the codebook and definitions I first examined a corpus of short statements made by self-identified endorsers of Roy Moore that had been collected by reporters and were available in press accounts. I then took the general categories of strategies from Fransen et al. (2015) and developed a coding system to capture the statements. The list of the code definitions, categories and examples can be viewed in Appendix A.

During the coding procedures, there were areas of disagreement with another coder as to which code would best be suited for a given quote. Although the number was

relatively small, an Intercoder Agreement was going to be necessary to resolve the differences. The subjective assessment technique was used to reach a consensus (Guest et al., 2012). I identified the codes that were disagreed on and then had a discussion of possible ways to agree on a solution. Another coder and I did so by changing some of the code definitions and renamed the codes themselves if necessary.

I was using the strategy categories suggested by Fransen et al. Using applied thematic analysis, I created short definitions for our codes then followed up with longer definitions using with examples either from our data or constructed following the codebook rubric developed by Guest, McQueen & Namy (2012). The paragraph served as our coding unit. Many paragraphs had more than one strategy coded.

Through the development of coding, I identified several shortcomings using just the Fransen framework. I found that through the process of repetitive ideas I needed to add additional codes to complete the typology (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). I proceeded inductively in developing new categories. I identified repeating ideas that were not captured by the Fransen framework and developed definitions for three additional persuasion resistance strategies: Threats to Freedom, Conspiracy Theory Reasoning, and Uncertainty. I found the codes to be useful in filling in the gaps that the Fransen framework did not address. It was discussed if uncertainty, threats to freedom and conspiracy theory reasoning could be placed in a different category. I decided that some context would be necessary, and an assumption would have to be made about the meaning of the statement, so I left the categories alone. It can be speculated that based on all contributing factors Fransen's framework was largely consistent with this study's results.

Next, I went over the corpus of statements reworking the definitions so that I could achieve a consensus. I used QDA Miner Software Analysis program for textual analysis. I made several passes through the data to achieve a consensus on which code would be used for each quote. Some quotes had more than one code assigned to them because of the multiple statements they contained. During the passes through the data, it was clear that I would have to add a code and definition to address the number of quotes that basically so vague or non-committal that none of our existing codes would work. I added the code "no comment" to address this issue.

During the several passes I made through the data I did eliminate "optimism bias" because this code after further discussion was not applicable to our study since it required us to make assumptions about the state of mind of the person being quoted. The updated system was then used to recode the data. Two coders independently coded all the data. Coding disagreements were resolved by discussion (following procedures described by Guest and McNamey (2012).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In order to answer the first research question, I used QDA Minor software to create a chart that shows the frequency of use of each code. The results are found in the table below.

RQ1. What kinds of persuasion resistant strategies were Roy Moore Supporters most likely to use?

Table 1. Frequency of Strategy Use

Code	Frequency	Percentage of total
Attitude Bolstering	102	27.7%
Self-Assertion	58	15.8%
Social Validation	50	13.6%
Contesting the Source	42	11.4%
Diminish/Minimize	28	7.6%
Defend Autonomy	26	7.0%
Contesting the Content	25	6.8%
Conspiracy Allegation	20	5.4%
Weighting Attributes	13	3.9%
Non-Committal	3	.008%
Total	367	100%

The Empowerment category accounted for 57.2% of resistance strategies.

Examples of Attitude Bolstering (27.7%) include “This characterizes Judge Roy Moore. He is a man committed to his principles no matter what the cost” and “I’ve known him my whole life and I’ve never known him to do anything inappropriate.” Self-Assertion (15.8%) include such statements as “Not only do I endorse him, I’m doubling-down on my endorsement I’m sending him some money and am sending him a check. I love him” and “My endorsement is unflinching.” Social Validation (13.6%) was exemplified by

statements such as “But we stand with Judge Roy Moore and I stand with Judge Roy Moore” and “People who know Judge Roy Moore the best are the ones who are standing with him now.”

Contesting the Source, Diminish/Minimize, and Defend Autonomy followed with 26.1 percent. These strategies are in three different categories, Contesting, Biased Processing, and Challenge Presumptions respectively. Contesting the Source was used 11.4% of the time and included citations such as “I would take his word before I would take the word of the people that's accusing him” and “It is a matter of legitimacy, not just how many. How many are actually been paid or been coerced to do this?” Diminish/Minimize represented 7.6% of the total quotations who made such statements as “Let's get real. It was a different world. Forty years ago in Alabama uh people could get married at 13 and 14 years old. “and “If allegations are reason enough to step down, then the Halls of Congress should be empty.” Defend Autonomy (7.0%) examples include “This is not Washington's choice. This is the people of Alabama's choice” and “So, I say this to Mitch McConnell and friends, and all of those out there trying to take out Roy Moore, I suggest that you take cover because Alabama is sending Roy Moore to the U.S. Senate.”

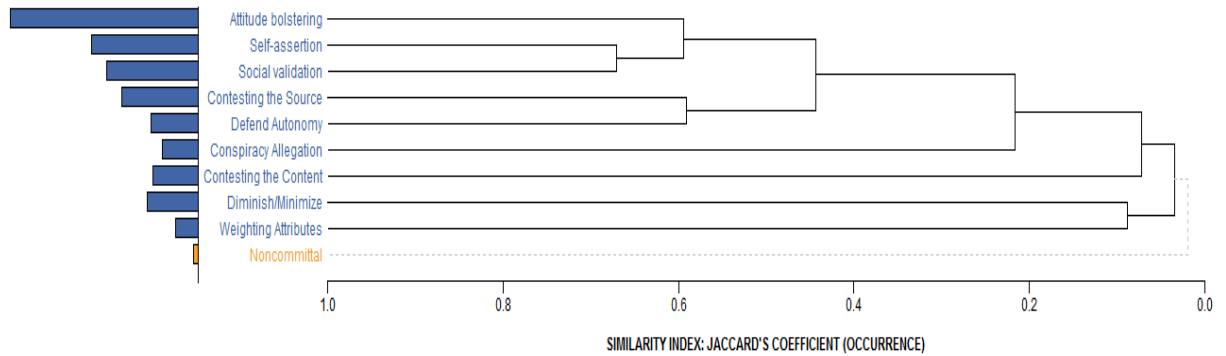
Contesting the Content (6.8%) was represented by replies such as “I just don't know how you can remember something that clearly after 40 years” and “I believe the accusations that have come out are false.” accounted for 6.8% of replies. Conspiracy Allegations at 5.4% was expressed in quotes including “Don't fall for George Soros assassination plan” and “Well perhaps satanically motivated, but Politically carried out.” Weighting attributes, just 3.9% of the group included statements like “Whether he did it, or

whether he did not do it, I like what the man stands for “and “I still reluctantly endorse him, because I share most of his social views.” Lastly Non-Committal was statistically insignificant with only 3 total responses along the lines of “At this time, we are not making any statements” and “I haven't put out a statement.”

For Research question 2 a dendrogram from QDA Miner using the Jaccard’s index was constructed. The Jaccard’s index indicates how frequently codes co-occur in each of these categories were included by speakers in their public statements. I would consider statements that cooccur above .40 to be of interest.

RQ2 What kinds of persuasion resistant strategies used tended to co-occur?

Table 2 Dendrogram of Strategy Co-Occurrence



As shown above Attitude Bolstering, Self-Assertion, and Social Validation make up the most important cluster showing that all three Empowerment strategies co-occur with regularity. This also reinforces the importance of the Empowerment strategies as shown in the frequency chart. The Second cluster Contesting the Source and Defend-Autonomy co-occur, and it seems to imply they occur together. All the five strategies also co-occurred with regular and all co-occurred at a frequency above .40 on Jaccard’s index.

I also ran an analysis to see if there were significant discrepancies between male and female responses of strategies used. The results are displayed in the Gender table below. The chart includes the percentage of statement made by male and female speakers in each category. Non-Committal with only three total responses was not included in the table.

Table 3: Strategy Usage by Sex

<u>Code</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Contesting the Content	79%	21%
Contesting the Source	36%	64%
Conspiracy Allegation	55%	45%
Attitude Bolstering	60%	40%
Self-Assertion	66%	34%
Social Validation	45%	55%
Weighting Attributes	54%	46%
Diminish/Minimize	61%	39%
Defend Autonomy	54%	46%
Percentage of Total Responses	57%	43%

Male quotes made up 57 percent of the total while female quotes accounted for the remaining 43 percent. Contesting the Content and Self-Assertion were the categories that most exceeded the male baseline proportion of 57%. Contesting the Source (64%) and Social Validation (55%) were used considerably more than the 43% of total female quotes. Other than the small Contesting the Content category the biggest disparity between genders was Self-Assertion with males at 66% usage to females 34%. Diminish/Minimize and Attitude Bolstering also showed large differences with males using the strategies roughly 20% more than females. This may indicate patterns to explore in a larger content analytic study. Based on cultural factors, males be predisposed

to use self-assertation more than females. In the case of females, most of the quotes were taken in a rally type atmosphere and it could be assumed that the venue had something to do with the participants' need to use Social Validation and Contesting the Source more often.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The main goal of this study was to identify the resistance strategies that were used the most to dispute evidence presented that was contrary to an individuals' beliefs. Considering recent events taking place in the United States concerning the proliferation of false information being dispersed by various media outlets, it is important to identify and understand the motivations that cause people to believe things that are just not true. Trump expressed over 30,000 lies or misleading statements while he was in office, most recently his belief that the 2020 election was stolen from him (Kessler et al., 2020). These false statements individuals and the media have led to the growth of conspiracy groups like QAnon and spurred violence such as the attack on the Capital. In an effort to stop the spread of a lie, social media platforms have banned individuals who engage in this type of behavior most notably Donald Trump. It should be noted that since Trump and some of his allies were banned on social media the amount of false news being spread dropped by 73% just on Twitter (Timberg & Dvoskin, 2021). Belief in conspiracy theories is not confined to either right-wing or left-wing ideologies. Recent conspiracy theories as related to GMOs and radiation fears associated with the Fukushima nuclear accident came from the left (Uscinski, 2019,

The most important result of this study was that it shows that people not only think about resistance strategies they also verbalize them. The verbal responses can then be studied/coded to see which contesting strategies are used the most and in what context. The verbal communication of resistance strategies allowed me to apply Fransen's

framework to the responses and quantify them. This study gave some validation to Fransen's theory of resistance by supplying verbal proof that people do use them in the manner his paper suggested. The frequency with which empowerment strategies were employed sets up the question of whether this persuasion resistant strategy type is also quite important in other naturally occurring discourse.

Another contribution of this study is that it enabled me to add several strategies to Fransen's topology. I also made some changes to Fransen's strategy list. I added the categories of Conspiracy Allegation and Defend Autonomy. Conspiracy Allegation fits with contesting information class addition. Defend Autonomy was coded to collect the quotes that would be considered threats to freedom. I dropped Optimism Bias because it did not fit well with this grouping, but it would still be relevant in discussing vaccination resistance for example. Concern for change is another topic that may come up when discussing defund the police.

The three empowerment strategies also frequently co-occurred near each other in discourse. This is an indicator that the empowerment category is conceptually coherent. The strategies of Contesting the Source and Defend Autonomy also co-occurred in close proximity. The press conferences, which were a source of a considerable amount of the overall discourse in this data set, could have influenced the frequency with which certain strategies were found to co-occur (i.e., one speaker's comments influence the strategies employed by subsequent speakers).

The most used resistance strategy according to the Fransen framework was contesting the source. While it was the fourth most used in the samples, the venue most

likely played a part in the results. A large part of the responses was taken in an atmosphere full of Moore supporters. Because the purpose of the participants was to rally support for Moore, it is not surprising that three empowerment resistances strategies, Attitude Bolstering, Self-Assertion, and Social Validation were used more frequently than in these situations. Contesting the Source and Diminish/Minimize would also contribute to the use of empowerment strategies given the fact that Moore was accused of something.

Co-occurrences are in line with what was expected considering the venues these samples were taken. Contesting the Source has a low probability of co-occurring with Attitude Bolstering seems surprising because it may be assumed that when people attack the source, they would follow that with a statement reminding themselves why they believe in something to begin with. Like Diminish/Minimize and Defend Autonomy have a high probability of co-occurring. Attitude Bolstering followed by a statement of Non-Committal have a low probability of occurring. Since Attitude Bolstering statements reminds an individual of why they believe in something it does not makes sense that it would be followed by a statement of Non-Committal. The messages would be conflicting. Attitude Bolstering followed by Diminish/Minimize statements also has a low probability of co-occurring. Weighting the Attributes and Diminish/Minimize have a lower probability of co-occurring which is a little surprising. One would think that when people care more about the positive qualities of an individual any statements made that would be considered negative even if true would be rejected. Most importantly all three Empowerment strategies are shown to co- occur most often.

When looking at the data from the Code Frequency by Gender table men used all

three of the Empowerment strategies the most which is in line with the total usage in the Frequency Chart. Women used Attitude bolstering the most followed by Contesting the Source and Social Validation which would seem to indicate that females did not feel comfortable with Self Assertion as a means of resistance. In males Self Assertion was by far the most used strategy which indicates men feel more at ease in self-asserting themselves. There could be several reasons for this not covered in this paper, but it would seem to be something that would be of interest to investigate.

Limitations of Study

There were several limitations to the study most notable of these was the case study quotes came from ardent Moore supporters. So, the responses are predictable. Some of the venues are set up specifically to support Moore so statements could be influenced by crowd reaction to pro Moore declarations. This is a single case study, where I only looked at the very overt messaging that people employed to defend their choice in a public context, so generalizability is an issue. I had no ability to really assess the degree of avoidance as a strategy that is likely most prevalent according to Fransen. The study was a representation of only one worldview, Kahan's hierarchical viewpoint of Southern evangelicalism.

Because this is not an experiment, I could not test Fransen's model predictions of how motivation would align with specific types of strategies that are shown in fig.1. The case study has properties that limits how generalizable the descriptive result are-political topic closely related to a political personality-so typology not complete and rank of different strategies might change. In this study people were defending their beliefs about Roy Moore focusing on the honesty of a person and a politician. Moore supporters and

people who are anti-vaccine, oppose nuclear power or are against GMO food have several things in common. They all in some instances rely on false information. They all feel that their beliefs are correct and will reject anyone or anything that disputes them.

Future Research

It would be interesting to investigate my finding to other types of case studies to see if these results replicate. Look not only at politics but other controversial subjects like refusing vaccinations where facts are overlooked when embracing an ideology. Include gender and race distinctions when analyzing statements as done in this study but in a larger sample group with various topics. Apply this research to past events including but not limited to Nixon resignation and more recently the Clinton Impeachment Trial. Look for similarities in statements past a present. While this study is limited, a larger study could find ways to possibly encourage people to explore the facts of a given situation by anticipating (probability)the resistance responses and dealing with them in real time. Study whether other world views show a similar pattern of strategy use in political communication, additional work in this area is needed. Lastly, engage in experimental work to assess all options, including avoidance.

Another area of study that would be interesting, given of all the focus on social media platforms by lawmakers would be applying Fransen's model to social media posts. It's possible to look at both the beliefs of the person posting and the likely responses. Not only will you be able to see posts of shared beliefs you will also likely find opposing views and how they are handled. Another area worth studying is how the right and left leaning news outlets fashion their programming to the belief systems of their viewers. People will avoid a contradictory message they receive on TV by simply changing the

channel or turning off the set. A study to see if Fransen's motivations of resistance apply to the selection of content on right or left leaning media outlets could be interesting. CNN and MSNBC cut away from a Trump press briefing (Johnson, 2020) and Fox stopped covering the second impeachment hearing after the attack on the capital was shown (Bauder, 2021). These two examples show that media outlets are aware of what content their viewers prefer and what kinds of resistance strategies they likely use to avoid a contradictory message. The examples also show that avoiding content that will cause their audience to employ a particular resistance strategy is used by both right and left leaning political groups.

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APPENDIX A

Code Definitions (Category) Examples

Code/Category/Definitions	Examples
<p>Contesting the Content (Contesting)-A behavior in which individuals study the persuasive message and look for inconsistencies that can be used in a counter argument thereby decreasing the effectiveness of the message.</p>	<p>1: “None of the people who have worked with him for years and know him the best deny that they have seen any hint of behavior like this.”</p> <p>2: “None of this has come up in any of his previous statewide campaigns in the past 30 years. Nothing like this has ever come out before.”</p>
<p>Contesting the Source (Contesting)--A strategy that involves dismissing the trustworthiness of the source of the conflicting message</p>	<p>1. “You're just a piece of propaganda, part of the propaganda campaign.”</p> <p>2. “People are not believing your lies, they are not buying your papers, they are not trusting the media.”</p>

<p>Conspiracy Allegations (Contesting)-Person asserts that matters are not as they appear: Powerful people or interests are trying to manipulate and deceive people and thus control the public agenda. The nefarious motives of the accused conspirators may be highlighted.</p>	<p>1: “This is all about Mitch McConnell trying to protect his turn in the Senate. He does not want a strong Christian and constitutionalist like Roy Moore in the Senate.””</p> <p>2: “Appearances are deceiving. These stories are nothing but a smokescreen being used to divert us from the real issues in this campaign.”</p>
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Code/Category/Definitions	Examples
<p>Attitude Bolstering (Empowerment)- A method by which people create thoughts that are in keeping with of their existing beliefs, by reminding themselves of all the reasons why they believe this way in the first place.</p>	<p>1.” I have been with him when it was good days, I have been with him when it was bad days. And never once has he been anything short of a Southern Christian gentleman.”</p> <p>2. “I have always known him to be a person of integrity who speaks the truth.”</p>
<p>Self-Assertion (Empowerment)-Techniques used by people who possess high levels of self-esteem to avoid messages that do not fit into their belief system. These people feel confident about their belief</p>	<p>1.” Not only do I endorse him, I'm doubling down on my endorsement I'm sending him some money and am sending him a check. I love him.”</p> <p>2. “My endorsement is unflinching.”</p>
<p>Social Validation (Empowerment)-People assert that their attitudes or intentions are supported by an important person(s), influential groups, or substantial numbers of people share their views. This includes assertions that the attitude or intentions are shared by most of the relevant community. Statements that include collective pronouns such as "we" and "our" are indicators of social validation reasoning.</p>	<p>1.“Our beliefs are right, and I need to separate ourselves from the non-believers.”</p> <p>2.“Idon't desert our friend's just on mere accusations; it's time for us to collectively fight the accusations.”</p>
<p>Weighting Attributes (Biased Processing)-Person explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the negative information but asserts that their attitude or intentions is driven by more important values or interests.</p>	<p>1.” I still reluctantly endorse him because I share most of his social views.”</p> <p>2."He is prolife and that is what is more important to me than any discretions he may have committed in the past."</p>

Code/Category/Definitions	Examples
<p>Diminish/Minimize (Biased Processing)- People downplay or minimize the importance of the negative information, so it does not measurably affect their overall attitude or behavioral intentions. Criticizing the "other side" of hypocrisy doing or excusing similar or worse actions falls in this category (i.e., Whataboutsim or deflection).</p>	<p>1: "This is our decision about who we want to represent us in Washington. Mitch McConnell has no right to tell us that he may overturn our vote and not seat Roy Moore if we elect him as our Senator."</p> <p>2: "We Alabamians resent other media coming in here and telling us how We should vote in this election. This is our choice not theirs."</p>
<p>Defend Autonomy (Challenge Presumptions)-Person asserts that other people, especially outsiders, have no right to tell them what to think or how to act on the matter at hand. This involves collective autonomy (our decision) assertions as well as individual autonomy (i.e., my decision).</p>	<p>1." I do know what kind of man he is today. I know what he stands for and he is an Independent Thinker. They don't want people who think for themselves in Washington."</p> <p>2. "It is unfair to judge someone's behavior in the 1970s by today's standards. There were a lot of Alabama mothers that would have been thrilled about their teenage daughter dating a District Attorney in the 1980s."</p>
<p>Non-Committal (Avoid)- Not expressing or revealing commitment to a definite opinion or course of action.</p>	<p>1. "I don't have an opinion yet."</p> <p>2. "No comment."</p>

APPENDIX B

Individuals Quoted

CNN/ Al Jazeera segment 12/03/17

1. Kim Dowdle
2. Cindy Skarda
3. Ann Eubank
4. Male Interviewee 1
5. Male Interviewee 2
6. Woman Interviewee 1
7. Woman Interviewee 2
8. Woman Interviewee 3
9. Woman Interviewee 4
10. Male Interviewee 3

Frank Luntz Focus Group Interview 12/9/2017

1. Rhonda Richardson
2. Chuck Moore
3. Jane Wade
4. Gina Doran
5. Scottie Porter
6. Harry Vance
7. Peggy Montalbano

Women rally for Roy Moore at the Alabama Capitol 11/17/17

1. Becky Garretson
2. Gina Boggs
3. Ann Ewbank
4. Jennifer Case
5. Bonnie Sox
6. Shannon Chambly
7. Janet Porter
8. Amy Kramer

Birmingham Press Conference 11/16/17

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|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Janet Porter | 11. Flip Benham |
| 2. Steven Hots | 12. Stephan Brodan |
| 3. Alan Keyes | 13. Nosen Lighter |
| 4. Andrew Schlafly | 14. Rusty Thomas |
| 5. Tom Brown | 15. Tim Yarbrough |
| 6. Elizabeth Johnson | 16. Beth Folger |

7. Joel Bren
8. Gordan Klingenschmidt
9. Ernie Sanders
10. Lisa Panette

17. Harold Larson
18. David Floyd
19. Jim Nelson

Splinter Article 11/17/17

1. David Eastman
2. William Gheen
3. Dr. Mat Staver
4. Troy Newman
5. Dr. Rick Scarborough
6. Peter LaBarbera
7. Gordon James Klingenschmitt
8. John Giles
9. Star Parker
10. Jennifer Montrose
11. Stan Cooke
12. Earl Wise
13. Rick Simpson
14. Reverend David Whitney
15. Paul Gottfried
16. Trip Pittman
17. Tommy Hanes
18. Mike Holmes
19. Sean Hannity
20. Mark Levin
21. Steve Deace

22. Ann Coulter
23. Bradley Byrne
24. Robert Aderholt
25. Ed Henry
26. Danny Crawford
27. Lynn Greer
28. Elizabeth Johnston
29. Dr. David E. Gonnella
30. Mike Allison
31. Jamie Holcomb
32. Mark Gidley
33. Bill Snow
34. Bruce Jenkins
35. David Floyd
36. Paul Hubbard
37. Alan Keyes
38. Bob Vander Plaats
39. Randy Wood
40. William Green
41. Mike Ball

Evangelist Gordon James Klingelschmidt Interviews 11/29/17

1. Gordon James Klingelschmidt
2. Rich Hobson
3. Suzie Hobson

Last Moore Rally 12/12/17

1. Karl Ivey
2. Paula Ronchon
3. Ronald Baker
4. Steve Bannon

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2013-16