**Does Closeness Effect Lying
Online Versus Lying In-Person?**

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Baby Michael stares his young colleague, baby Jefferey, in the eyes and hits the blue and gold power ranger out of his hands. Baby Michael smiles - baby Jeffrey bursts out crying. Baby Michael is confused. He is asking himself - Why would Jefferey cry? Why is the teacher coming over with a mean look on her face? Why am I being put in the time out corner? Lucky for baby Michael these types of trial and error situations are what helps build social guidelines. The Power Ranger incident with Jeffrey taught Michael that it is not acceptable to hit toys out of one another's hands. Michael knows that if he does this again he may upset a colleague and end up in the time out corner. As young humans develop, a line between what is socially acceptable behavior and what is socially unacceptable behavior is created. It is important to note that while this line is created it does not mean that it cannot be crossed.

Young humans may learn - just as baby Michael learned not to hit the toy - that crossing the line between the acceptable and the unacceptable may be necessary in order to get what they want. This ability to recognize the social norms and manipulate them to one's favor is called Machiavellian intelligence. Machiavellian intelligence has been found to develop in humans among the age of four (11,13) . At four years old one may understand the gamble which is involved in activities such as lying or becoming physically aggressive - "If I don't get caught then there is nothing for me to worry about". There are many punishments which can arise from getting caught. One of the most basic and instinctive is being looked at as a defector and shunned from further cooperation.

This "socially unacceptable behavior" is one which has become extremely relevant with the advent of electronic communication. In particular, online lying has become of extreme interest. Electronic communication such as email or instant messaging provides a great way to communicate with someone who is half way around the world. The down side to this form of communication is no physical or audio cues can be observed - making the ability to lie much easier. Due to the ease of online deception there is great reason to believe that people would be more willing to lie online than in person. Researchers Naquin, Kurtzberg, and Liuba conducted an experiment which revealed that lying increases by fifty percent when communicating over an electronic medium (6). Lying on websites like OKCupid has been found to be extremely common. Statistics from the male and female users of the website OKCupid have been analyzed and it

shows that - among other things - the average user is actually 2-3 inches shorter and 20% poorer than they claim to be (10). A question which should be asked is why? Why has it been found that lying increases when communicating over an electronic medium? A study by the University of Massachusetts Amherst tested 110 same sex pairs of college students who engaged in 15 minutes of conversation either face-to-face, email, or direct messaging. The conversations were then tested for inaccuracies and found that while deception was present in all forms of communication - it was much higher while communicating through email. The heads of the study, Feldman and Zimbler, believe that lying increases due to de-individualization. As people grow psychologically and physically further apart the more likely they are to lie (14). In Iain King's book *How to Make Good Decisions and Be Right All the Time*, he advocates lying and suggests rules for lying. "Deceive only if you can change behaviour in a way worth more than the trust you would lose, were the deception discovered (whether the deception actually is exposed or not)"(5). Kings books brings up many different questions: If a rule for lying was stated, would it be followed? Would lying become something not looked down upon unless the rule was broken?

The U.S. department of justice is looking to answer this question. Lying on Facebook or a dating site may soon be illegal. The justice department is currently processing a law which would give the owner of a website the ability to determine whether or not he/she would like to press charges against online deception. If a user on a dating site claims he is 20 but he is actually 16 then the owners of the site have the right to press charges (7). This law might compensate for the lack of audio or visual cues given off when lying in person and influence persons not to lie online. Would it work?

Catalina Toma, communication science professor at the University of Wisconsin has another method which may help to deter, or at least catch, online liars. Toma looked at personal descriptions written for Internet dating profiles and found that the liars among the group would stray from using the first person pronoun "I". Liars would also write less because, "The less they write, the fewer untrue things they may have to remember and support later." (1).

There is no concrete method to call out a liar online but is it possible that as humans we may evolve to develop one? Researchers DePaulo and Morris have collected

over thirty years of data which suggests implicit lie detection in humans. This means that as time has passed - and liars have lied - the human mind has evolved and begun to come up with a defense against lying (2). Whether the human brain may ever come up with a defense against online lying - we may never know. To begin with it may be hopeful to listen to the words of scientist Jeff Hancock who stated "One of my friends is a prison guard, and he and I were talking about some of our research, and he told me there's a saying among the guards that if something doesn't feel right, it's not," Hancock said. "The idea (with spotting online deception) is to pay attention to how you're feeling about things, and that if something doesn't feel quite right or is too good to be true, it probably is." (14). Hancock is pointing out once again that there is no concrete way to detect online liars except by using instinct. Perhaps by discovering why people are more likely to lie online one can build defenses against it.

The study I completed was testing how closeness effects lying online versus lying in person. I believe that closeness does make a difference when it comes to lying. Lying is prefered online vs. in-person because less closeness is felt towards individuals online. Another possible outcome would be that people feel a higher closeness to individuals online versus in-person. This would result in a preference to lie in-person vs. online.

Materials & Method

Materials:
A. A test group of 30 participants.
B. A questionnaire (*Survey 1*)
C. A computer.
D. Data processing software such as Excel or Numbers.

Method:
In order to perform the experiment I needed to create an online test. Online tests are extremely efficient when it comes to collecting data. The online test was distributed through various social networking sites such as Facebook, Google+, Twitter and Tumblr. I did this based on the assumption that the majority of users on the sites have dealt with lying online. Once I had received 30 surveys from 30 different participants I analyzed the data using Google Docs and Microsoft Excel.

Results

The data from the experiment yielded very interesting results. All of the participants revealed that they do feel a different, lesser degree of closeness to friends, family and strangers online than they feel in-person. The data also revealed that when the participants fitness was in danger they are more likely to lie online rather than in-person.

The data displayed in *graph 1* is based off of the questions "On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with a parent when communicating online." and "On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with a parent when communicating in-person." The participants on average rated 8.5 in closeness in-person and a 5.9 in closeness online. The red bar refers to the in-person ranking and the blue bar refers to the online ranking. Another interesting aspect of the data is the p-value. The p-value is a way of testing whether or not the data collected occurred by chance or is statistically significant. A p-value of .05 or lower usually signifies that the data is statistically significant and did not occur by chance. The p-value for graph 1 is .0000000000264 - meaning the data collected is extremely reliable.

The results which are illustrated in *graph 2* are based off the questions "On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with your best friend when communicating online." and "On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with your best friend when communicating in-person." The participants on average rated an 8.9 in closeness in-person and a 7.4 in closeness online. The p-value is .0000068429 which means that the data is reliable and was very unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Graph 3 is based off the questions "On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with a stranger when communicating online." and "On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with a stranger when communicating in-person." The participants on average rated 4.8 in closeness in-person and a 3.2 in closeness online. The p-value for this graph is .00240099 which is higher than the p-value of *graph 1* & *2* but still suggests the data is reliable.

Graphs 1-3 illustrate an overall higher ranking of closeness felt in-person versus online. This means that there is a separation which occurs when communicating online. A friend is considered less of a friend when commu-

nicating online, a parent is considered less of a parent and a stranger is more of a stranger. Online communication and in-person communication create multiple personas out of one person.

Charts 1-5 represent a series of questions in which the participants were asked whether or not they would prefer to perform certain actions online vs. in-person. *Chart 1* is depicting that 68% of the participants would rather talk to an authority figure in-person vs. online. As seen in *Chart 2* 75% of the participants would feel more comfortable telling their boss a valid excuse for missing work in-person. However the results changed in *Chart 3*. The data shows that 75% of the participants would feel more comfortable telling their boss a false excuse online. The data from *chart 2* and *chart 3* would suggest that when lying is involved the participants would rather lie online then in-person. *Chart 4* illustrates that 75% of the participants - if forced to lie - would lie online rather than in person. *Chart 5* shows that 82% of the participants would feel worse after lying to their parents in-person then they would online.

Discussion

The information received from this study was extremely interesting and provided clear results. Closeness does affect lying online. When comparing the data from graphs 1-3, and charts 1-5 a link can be seen between lying and closeness. On average the participants feel closer when communicating in-person then they do online, and on average the participants would rather lie online then in-person. The data suggests that the reason why the participants would rather lie online is because they feel less close to the person they are lying to. One of the participants said, "I feel less connection with people online, therefore I would feel less guilty about lying to a person online". Another participant said "I would lie online because I wouldn't be able to actually see the person".

Another interesting aspect to the results were the responses from the participants when asked, "Why is it easier to lie online versus in person?". Participants brought up verbal cues, body language, facial expressions and time as reasons why lying in-person is more difficult then lying online. Statements included, "In person you have to deal with your own body language…. your body will be saying one thing while your words

say another." and "You have more time to think of a response/no body language, and no eye contact". These responses answer what aspects of lying are lost in online communication but are found in in-person communication, and will in turn will help answer why participants feel less close online vs. in-person. When communicating online aspects of communication such as body language, verbal cues, eye contact and time are all lost. Participants may feel less close online because of this fact.

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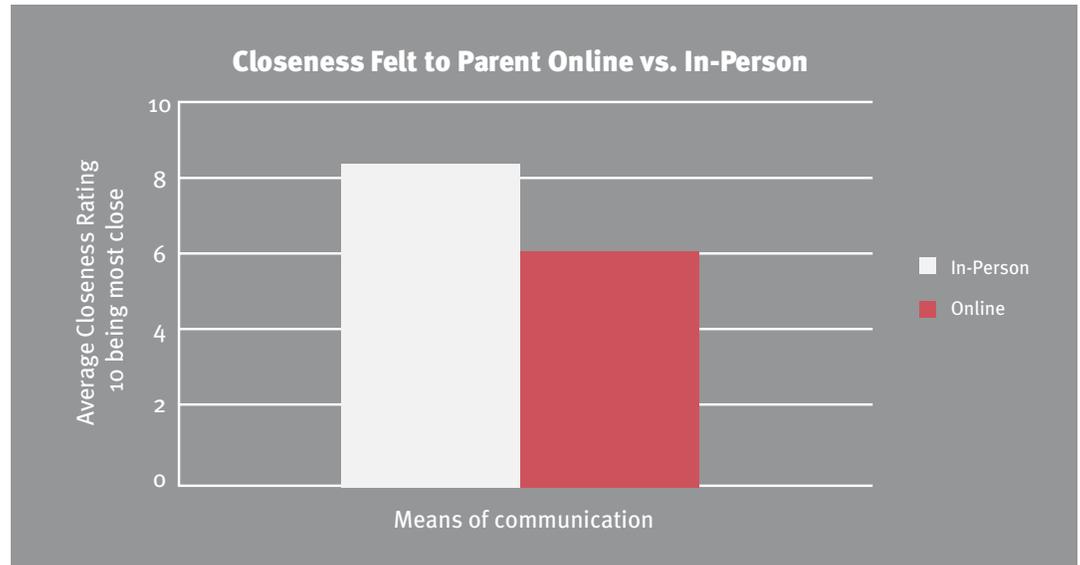
Appendix

Survey 1

1. Are you a Male or Female?
2. Do you use the internet to communicate with friends and family?
3. What is your preferred form of online communication?
4. On a scale from One to Ten rate how close you feel with the people you MOST frequently communicate with online.
5. Would you rather talk to a figure of authority online or in person?
6. Would you rather tell a professor or boss that you are missing work online or in person?
7. Would you rather explain a VALID excuse for missing work online or in person?
8. Would you rather explain a MADE UP excuse for missing work online or in person?
9. Would you feel worse after lying to your Mom or Dad online or in person?
10. If you had no choice but to lie would you do it online or in person? Why?
11. Have you recently lied online?
12. Please rate your closeness to the individual(s) you most recently lied to
13. On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with a parent when communicating in person.
14. On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with a parent when communicating online.
15. On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with your best friend when communicating in person.
16. On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with your best friend when communicating online.
17. On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with a stranger when communicating in person.
18. On a scale from One to Ten please rate how close you feel with a stranger when communicating online.
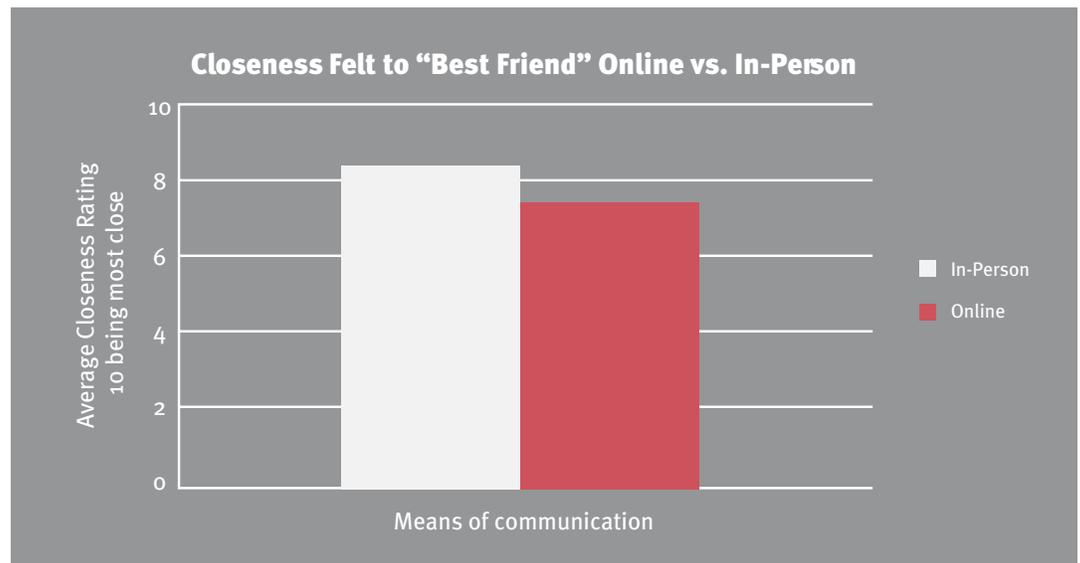19. Is it easier to lie online then it is in person?
20. If yes, why?

Graph 1

The white bar refers to the in-person ranking of closeness and the red bar refers to the online ranking of closeness. This graph suggests that - on average - the participants feel closer to their parents online then they do in person.

Closeness Felt to Parent Online vs. In-Person

Average Closeness Rating 10 being most close

Means of communication

In-Person
Online

Graph 2

On average - the participants feel closer to their best friends online then they do in person.

Closeness Felt to "Best Friend" Online vs. In-Person

Average Closeness Rating 10 being most close

Means of communication

In-Person
Online

Graph 3

On average - the participants feel closer to a stranger online then they do in person. This is interesting considering all of the relationships which occur online.
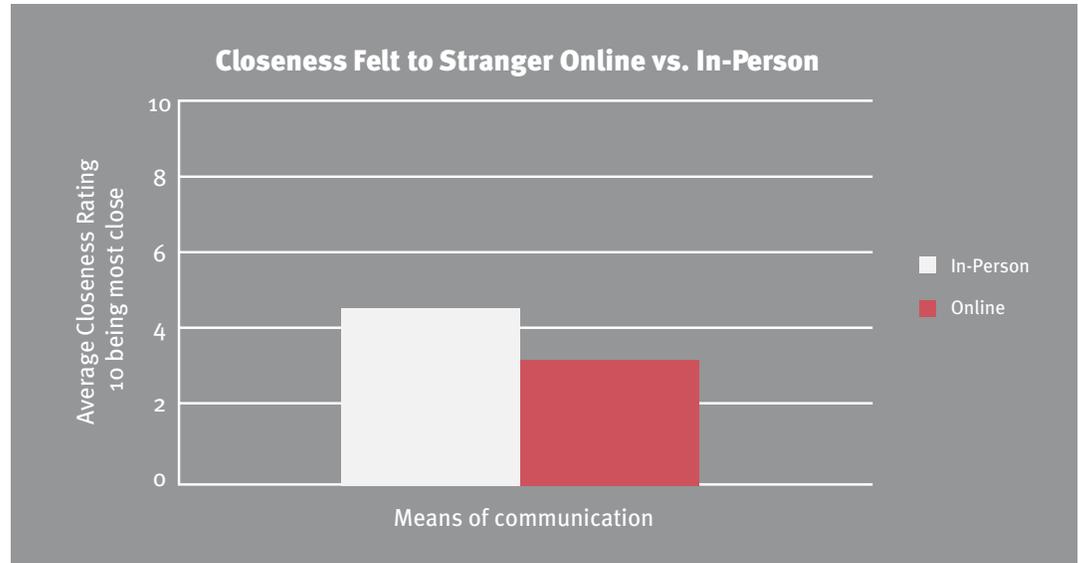
Closeness Felt to Stranger Online vs. In-Person

Average Closeness Rating
10 being most close

Means of communication

- In-Person
- Online

Chart 1

This chart shows that - on average - when asked if the participants would rather talk to an authority figure online or in person - over half of the participants (68%) would rather talk to a authority figure in-person.

Would you rather talk to a figure of authority online or in-person?
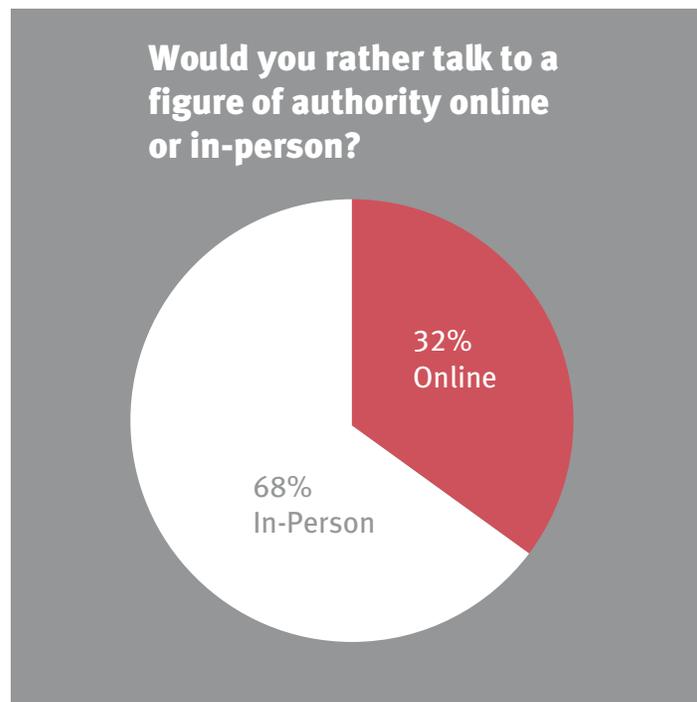
32%
Online

68%
In-Person

Chart 2

This chart shows that when asked if the participants would rather explain a valid excuse for missing work online or in-person - on average - 75% of the participants would rather give a valid excuse in person.

Would you rather explain a VALID excuse for missing work online or in-person?
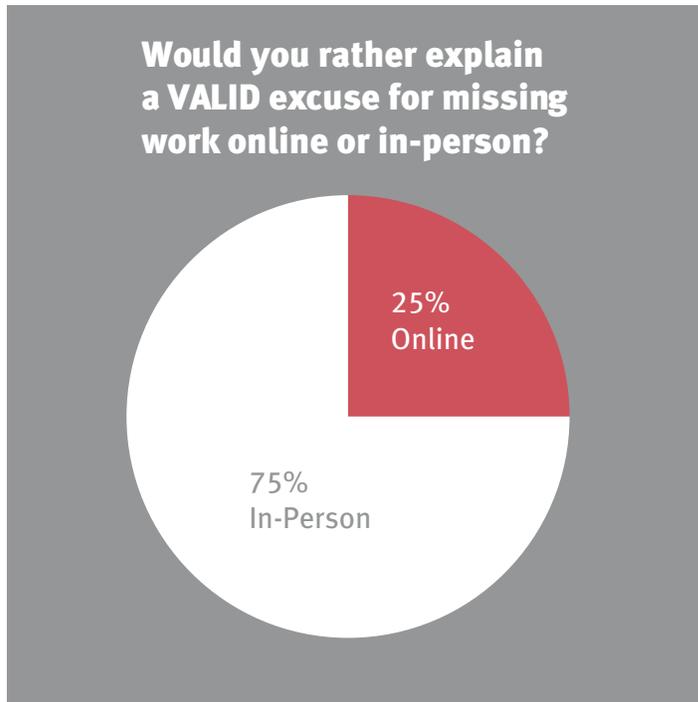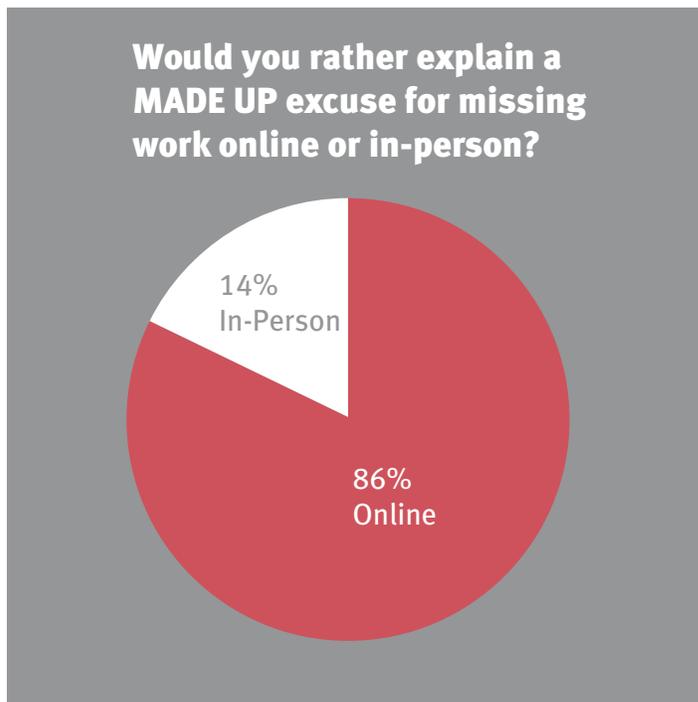
25%
Online

75%
In-Person

Chart 3

This chart shows that when asked if the participants would rather explain a false or made up excuse for missing work online or in-person - on average - 86% of the participants would rather give a valid excuse in person. It is incredible how big of a jump the participants made from in-person communication to online communication when lying was involved.

Would you rather explain a MADE UP excuse for missing work online or in-person?
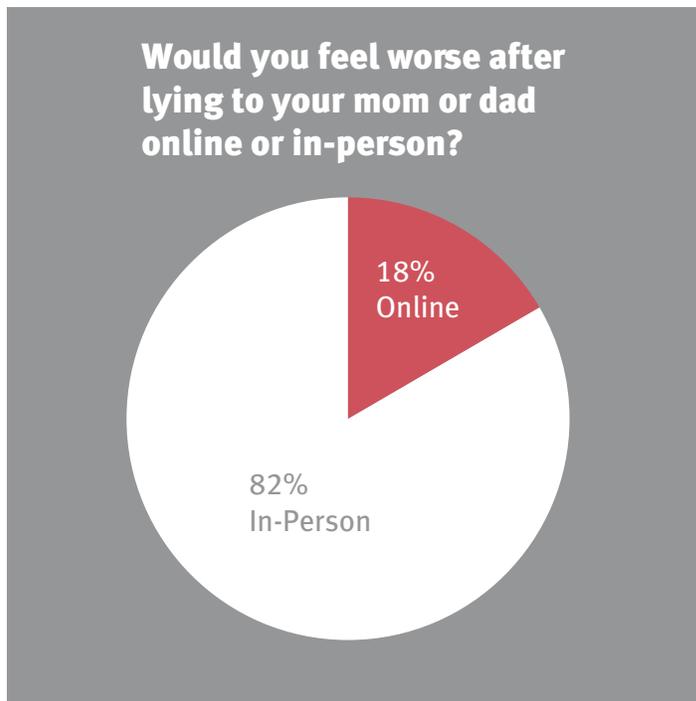
14%
In-Person

86%
Online

Chart 4

This chart shows that if the participants had to lie - on average - 75% of the participants would rather lie online then in-person.

If you had no choice but to lie would you do it online or in-person?

25% In-Person

75% Online

Chart 5

This chart shows that - on average - 82% of the participants would feel worse lying to their parents in-person versus online. When looking at graph 1 and chart 5 together it can be seen that the participants would rather lie online because they feel less close to their parents online vs. in-person.

Would you feel worse after lying to your mom or dad online or in-person?

18% Online

82% In-Person

This study could not have been acomplished without the help of Christopher Jensen.