Original Papers

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The Contributions of an Attribution Approach to Emotion and Motivation

Abstract: *In this paper, the empirical and theoretical contributions of an attribution approach to emotion and motivation are reviewed. It is contended that reported empirical findings regarding when causal search is initiated, the perceived causes of events, the three underlying properties of causes (locus, stability, and control), and the relations between these properties and emotion and expectancy are definitively replicable. In addition, these data provide the foundation for both interpersonal (e.g., help-giving) and intrapersonal (e.g., achievement strivings) theories of motivation. Hence, attribution theory has left a theoretical foundation and a supporting array of data. In addition, the theory sheds light on some weaknesses of other approaches to motivation, which err in their understanding of phenomenal causality. The characterization of attribution theory as naïve or "grandmother" psychology is discussed and it is contended that a distinction must be made between its empirical versus conceptual features.*

Keywords: *attribution, causal beliefs, emotion, expectancy, help giving*

Inasmuch as attribution theory has been part of the psychological landscape for more than sixty years, it is a reasonable time to ask whether it has made any definitive contributions to the field of psychology. This is particularly important given the current *Zeitgeist* questioning the scientific credibility of psychological research. In this paper, I examine what empirical findings derived from an attribution approach are reliable (replicable) and what conceptual proposals might, as least for some extended period, withstand the test of time. In addition, I examine what attribution theory has added and clarified concerning other prominent motivation theories.

Attribution-related studies are diverse, ranging across many domains. I confine this paper to a theory of motivation and emotion that I, along with colleagues, associates, and others, have championed (Weiner, 1986, 1995, 2006). A rich literature more appropriate for cognitive psychology regarding the informational antecedents of causal beliefs is ignored in this paper but is deserving of a separate analysis. In a similar manner, extensions of attribution theory into developmental psychology, group processes, organizational behavior, behavioral change, political ideology and on and on are neglected in this context.

The foundation of an attribution approach concerns beliefs about causality. I therefore begin with insights about causes that at times trace back to the seminal ideas introduced by Fritz Heider (1958) and Harold Kelley (1967). Given the enormity of this literature, the reader is directed to reviews in Weiner (1985, 1995, 2006) for specific references.

Causal Beliefs

1. Individuals desire to know why events have occurred. That is, there is a spontaneous search to establish causation. This is particularly true when these events or outcomes are negative and unexpected. Hence, if one's car (or camel) fails to start, then the disappointed driver asks "why has this happened." This will not be the case if the car (or camel) functioned (a positive and expected outcome). Searching for causation is an aspect of cognitive functionalism, or the positive consequences of mental work.

2. Although there is a huge array of perceived causes of events, a small number dominate, whether the occurrence or state is very broad (e.g., illness), more concrete (e.g., cancer) or very specific (e.g., lung cancer). In the achievement domain, the predominant perceived causes of success and failure are ability and effort. That is, one succeeds because of being smart and/or working hard, whereas failure is produced by low ability and/or lack of

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effort. Of course, other perceived causes of achievement outcomes also are common, including bad luck, a poor referee, a biased teacher, illness, etc. In domains other than achievement, different causes prevail (at times with causal overlap between domains). For example, the salient perceived causes of poverty include no available jobs, lack of education, laziness, and illness. Lists of perceived causes have been gathered for many states and outcomes including winning or losing an election; health; wealth; crime; a variety of stigmatized conditions such as AIDS, alcoholism, cancer, heart failure, obesity, poverty; and on and on.

3. Causes share properties or characteristics. Although causes of achievement outcomes such as ability and effort, or causes of poverty such as no available jobs and lack of education, differ qualitatively, they also can be compared quantitatively. Often science advance by moving from qualitative distinctions (e.g., normal versus abnormal) to considering these on a continuum). Three shared properties have been identified, represented here by their anchors although they are better described as continua rather than dichotomies:

a. Locus (or location), either internal or external to the actor. This distinction has a lengthy history in psychology related to contrasts between drive and incentive (Hull, 1938), the person and the environment (Lewin, 1935), internal versus external control of reinforcement (Rotter, 1966), designation as an origin versus a pawn (de Charms, 1968), and the person versus the situation (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Focusing on the achievement domain, when considering why an exam was failed, the attributed causes might be ability or effort, regarded as internal to the failed person, or bad luck or a poor teacher, considered external to the actor. And poverty may be inferred to be caused by illness or laziness (internal to the poor person) or due to no available jobs or discrimination (external). Locus typically is the most salient property of causes – the question frequently asked in self-perception is whether an event or outcome is due to me or the situation, while in other-perception this translates to him/her versus the environment. It also was the primary discussed characteristic of causes in early attribution research, which often concerned the proposed underestimation of the situation and overestimation of the person as determinants of action.

b. Stability, either lasting or temporary, is another property of causes For example, when considering the causes of success, the attribution may be industriousness or aptitude, both regarded as enduring or stable, as opposed to good luck or unusual exertion, both generally considered temporary or unstable. This distinction also is captured, although not labeled as a causal dimension, in contrasts between characterological (stable) versus behavioral (unstable) blame (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). For example, blame may be placed on character (e.g. "I always do the wrong thing" – stable) versus behavior (e.g. "I was in the wrong place" – unstable), although this distinction also captures the concept of control, discussed later, and thus fails to distinguish separate causal properties. The stability dimension is even more evident in the distinction between entity (stable) versus incremental (unstable) mindsets regarding intelligence (Dweck, 2006). It has been proposed that an incremental, as opposed to an entity, mindset connotes that intelligence can change. However, not only does that conception fail to recognize this is a stability dimension, it also allows intelligence to only increase, so one could regard this as a fragmented stability dimension.

The proposed causal dimensions have some degree of independence. Hence, causes can be internal and stable (aptitude), internal and unstable (effort), external and stable (task difficulty) and external and unstable (luck).

c. Controllability – controllable or not controllable, is a third causal property. Lack of effort is the prototype of a controllable cause of failure – "it could have been otherwise." It appears that to control an event there must be internal causality. However, external causation also can be paired with control. For example, a poor grade perceived by the student as due to an unfair teacher, or noisy roommates, is not controllable by the student but is regarded as controllable by those external agents. It thus is necessary to specify whether a cause is controllable by the self versus by others. Continuing with this reasoning, failure by the actor perceived as caused by lack of aptitude (an internal cause) or the difficulty of the task (an external cause) are both regarded as uncontrollable.

The causal property of controllability is incorporated within the concept of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975) and is captured in various aspects of self-determination theory, where a central issue is whether a behavior is undertaken of free-will or is "forced" (Deci, 1975). Controllability also is related to blame, intentionality, and responsibility, which are integral concepts tied to moral judgments and legal decisions. This is because neither blame nor responsibility typically is inferred given uncontrollable causality, e.g., an individual with a mental handicap is not held morally responsible or blamed for failure at a difficult math exam – he or she "could not do otherwise."

No other causal property has been consistently documented across situation and motivation domains. Hence, locus, stability, and controllability appear to be *the* general characteristics of causes, although in specific circumstances it may be possible to distinguish other causal properties (e.g., letters of the alphabet that cause the onset of stuttering; types of shoes that cause blisters; and on and on).

Complexity given dimensional causality

Causal understanding involves subjective judgments and at times there are disagreements between individuals not only regarding the cause of an event but also concerning the perceived dimensional properties of that cause. For example, effort expenditure of another may be regarded as stable ("She is industrious") or unstable ("This time she worked hard"). Indeed, the essence of the mindset theory of intelligence (Dweck, 2006) is that some regard intelligence as stable whereas others perceive this characteristic as unstable. These examples

point out that judgments of causal stability may have some between-person disagreement. Conversely, on other occasions and/or for other causes there is high between-person agreement on dimension judgments. For example, aptitude commonly is regarded as internal, stable, and uncontrollable, which indeed defines what aptitude "is." Similarly, chance reliably is construed as external, unstable, and uncontrollable. Hence, aptitude and chance share one causal property (neither can be volitionally altered), while these two causes differ on perceived locus and stability.

Summary of causal knowledge

In sum, regarding our understanding of causes, it is known that individuals search for causal understanding, with expectancy disconfirmation and negativity (e.g., non-attainment of a goal) key antecedents of causal search; there are lists of perceived causes for many outcomes and states but typically a few are most salient, such as ability and effort as causes of achievement success and failure; causes share three properties: locus, stability, and controllability, so that they differ quantitatively as well as qualitatively and can be compared on these causal dimensions; and finally, for some causes such as aptitude and chance there is high interpersonal agreement on their properties, whereas for other causes such as effort there may be lower between-person reliability concerning dimensional characteristics, particularly with regard to stability. These conclusions can very safely be regarded as replicable truths.

Empirical Relations between Causes, Other Cognitions, and Emotions

In this section of the article, for each causal dimension one significant empirical association with other cognitions and/or emotions is examined, with examples for the most part from the achievement domain. I also examine more fully how these associations shed light on and clarify other conceptions of motivation.

1. Locus. Pride in accomplishment requires an internal ascription for success. Hence, one typically is proud when receiving an "A" in a class that is ascribed to high ability and/or high effort (internal causality), but not if the teacher gives that grade to everyone in the class, which promotes an external ascription (an easy teacher). In addition, pride extends across one's "ego sphere" so that one may be proud of one's children or one's country, as experienced by a person "swelling with pride" following the winning of the Olympics by his or her country.

This is one example of an outcome-cause-causal dimension-emotion sequence, specifically represented as follows:

Outcome (success) → Cause (high ability/high effort) → Essential dimension → (locus: internal) → Emotion (pride).

Inasmuch as the above progression lies at the heart of an attribution-based theory of emotion and action, let me elaborate on the antecedent empirical and theoretical steps leading to this formulation. First, there must be an observed inconsistent association between a successful outcome and pride:

Success → Pride
Success → No pride (other emotions)

Then, from an attribution perspective, it is hypothesized that perceived causality mediates the success-emotion relations. This is confirmed by data consistent with the following observations:

a. Outcome (success) → Causes (ability, effort) → Emotion (pride)
b. Outcome (success) → Causes (task ease, luck) → Emotion (no pride; other emotions)

Finally, it is reasoned that causes can be described according to basic dimensions such that ability and effort versus task ease and luck are two sets of causes that lie at opposing poles of a shared causal dimension. Specifically, ability and effort are similar in being internal to the actor whereas task ease and luck are classified as having external characteristics on the locus dimension. This leads to the outcome-cause-causal dimension-emotion sequence presented previously, which in part portrays the "deep structure" of emotion. This is the initial step of a motivated episode from an attribution perspective, depicted at the genotypic rather than phenotypic level.

Attribution theorists were not the first to examine pride within the context of achievement motivation. Atkinson (1957) also included pride in accomplishment in his theory of achievement strivings. He presumed that the amount of pride experienced (or the anticipation of pride) is determined by the difficulty of the task being undertaken. Specifically, the more difficult the task (or the lower the expectancy of success), the greater the pride anticipated and experienced given success. What Atkinson failed to specify is the responsible mechanism, namely, that task difficulty provides a causal cue inasmuch as success at an easy task elicits attribution of success to the task (an external attribution), whereas success at a difficult task promotes attributions to ability and/or effort, which are internal attributions. Hence, the relation between task difficulty and pride (expectancy and affect) noted by Atkinson is mediated by causal beliefs:

a. Outcome   →   Emotion
    (Success at an easy task)   (Low pride)
         ↓   ↑
    Cause   →   Essential dimension
    (the task)   (locus: external)

b. Outcome   →   Emotion
    (Success at a difficult task)   (high pride)
         ↓   ↑
    Cause   →   Essential dimension
    (ability and/or effort)   (locus: internal)

Without this inclusion, Atkinson has no mechanism to account for the relation between task difficulty and emotion.

2. Stability. Changes in expectancy of success are in part determined by the perceived stability of the cause. For example, following success or failure at a coin toss guess there tends to be small (and at times negative) shifts in the likelihood of future success because outcomes at this game are primarily perceived as due to luck, an unstable cause. On the other hand, success and failure at tasks of skill produce relatively large expectancy shifts in the direction of the outcome (a positive recency effect). That is, after success at a skill task expectancies regarding future outcomes at this type of task increase, whereas failure results in expectancy decrements. Rotter (1966) discovered this pattern of data when he compared expectancy changes given outcomes at luck- versus ability-determined tasks. However, he incorrectly related the differential expectancy shifts to the locus rather than to the stability dimension of causality. This error occurred because ability is internal as well as relatively stable, whereas luck is external as well as unstable, thereby resulting in a confound regarding causal understanding. The past is anticipated to be repeated when the cause of the prior event is perceived as enduring (rather than internal) and might change if the cause is temporary (rather than external). As was true in the case of Atkinson, attribution theory clarifies some prior theoretical shortcomings social learning theory as adopted by Rotter.

The stability-expectancy association also has emotional implications. An ascription of failure to an enduring cause gives rise to helplessness and hopelessness. On the other hand, failure ascribed to an unstable cause maintains hope for the future. After all, the cause may cease to be! Again a prior theoretical analysis, this one by Seligman, is contradicted and clarified by attribution theory in that stability rather than controllability is specified as the antecedent to hopelessness. The following sequences concerning a dating rejection exemplify the prior emotion representation by including the cognition of expectancy and illustrating attribution principles in a motivation context other than achievement:

a. Outcome (rejection) → Cause (other became married) → Essential causal dimension (Stability: stable) → Related cognitions (Rejection will be repeated; expectancy reduction) → Emotion (Hopeless)

b. Outcome (rejection) → Cause (other has the flu) → Essential causal dimension (Stability: unstable) → Related cognitions (Rejection may not be repeated; expectancy maintenance) → Emotion (Hope)

Note in the prior analysis the person has hope but certainly cannot control the course of the other person's flu! That is, one can be helpless without being hopeless, whereas hopelessness also implies helplessness.

3. Controllability. In the achievement domain, effort (a controllable cause) is the primary causal determinant of evaluation by others. The person exerting high effort who succeeds is highly evaluated, and when high effort overcomes or compensates for low ability and results in success, such as when a handicapped individual completes a marathon race, then this individual is admired as a moral hero. On the other hand, lack of effort given failure results in negative evaluation, and an individual with high ability who does not try and fails is a cultural villain eliciting blame and anger. Imagine your reaction toward one of your students (or children) with high ability who fails a course because of not studying or skipping class! These sequences may be represented as follows (here given observer- as opposed to self-perception):

a. Outcome (success) → Cause (high effort) → Essential causal dimensions (internal controllability: controllable by the actor) → Perceiver emotion (admiration)

b. Outcome (failure) → Cause (low effort) → Essential causal dimensions (internal controllability: controllable by the actor) → Perceiver emotion (anger)

The latter example contrasts with behavioral episodes when failure is caused by an uncontrollable cause such as lack of aptitude. These situations typically elicit sympathy from others and are captured with the following conceptual representation:

c. Outcome (failure) → Cause (lack of aptitude) → Essential causal dimension (controllability: uncontrollable) → Perceiver emotion (sympathy)

The prior discussion was again situated in the achievement domain, although perhaps the most established link between causal controllability and evaluation concerns reactions to stigmas. A number of stigmas have been demonstrated to elicit perceptions of controllable causality (e.g., AIDS, perceived as due to promiscuous sexual behavior or using contaminated drug needles; lung cancer, due to smoking; obesity, caused by over-eating or under-exercising; etc.). On the other hand, a variety of other stigmas are associated with uncontrollable causality (e.g., Alzheimer's disease, due to the aging process; mental and physical handicaps, because of a genetic deficiency; pancreatic cancer, due to a biological dysfunction; etc). Scores of studies have documented that perceived controllable stigmas elicit higher negative evaluations (more anger and less sympathy) than do stigmas paired with beliefs of uncontrollable causation. In a similar manner, the same stigma (e.g., obesity) elicits contrasting reactions when perceived as caused by over-eating as opposed to some genetic dysfunction. These causal perceptions, in turn, produces disparate emotional reactions.

Empirical integration

It then follows that emotional reactions of perceivers to others not trying at school and reactions toward the obese perceived as over-eating can be construed as governed by a singular "deep structure," just as are the similarity in reactions to a child failing math because of low ability and an individual with, say, obesity due to a genetic cause:

1. a. Outcome (school failure) → Cause (low effort)
    ↘
        Controllable by the actor → Anger
    ↗
   b. Stigma (obesity) → Cause (over-eating)

2. a. Outcome (school failure) → Cause (lack of aptitude)
    ↘
        Uncontrollable by the actor → Sympathy
    ↗
   b. Stigma (obesity) → Cause (genetic deficit)

Naïve psychology and empirical associations regarding causal dimensions

Some critics have described attribution theory as mere common sense, or what has been labeled "bubba (grandmother) psychology." That is, even one's grandmother would make the predictions generated by an attribution analysis. Is that reproach accurate regarding the set of relations just discussed between locus and pride; stability, expectancy, and hope; and control and anger and sympathy? One strategy to determine this is to employ the methodology of naïve psychology used by Heider, namely, thought experiments, and examine if naïve individuals not trained in psychology make the same predictions as attribution theorists. That is, do the core empirical associations "uncovered" by attribution theorists appear to be already known by laypersons (some of whom are grandmothers)? This cannot be "tested" in this article but some verification can be approached with the following exercise.

Considering, in turn, the causal dimension-emotion associations between locus and pride, stability and hope, and control and anger, which of the following pairs of alternatives do you (the reader) believe would be communicated?

a. A teacher wants to motivate a student by increasing his/her pride in accomplishment. Following a high score on an exam, which of the following would the teacher say?
   1. You received an A. I am a very easy teacher and everyone received this grade/or, you were just lucky.
   2. You received an A. You are good at this subject matter/or, you really studied well.
b. Bill calls Jill for a date and Jill refuses. She does not want him to call again. What does she tell Bill?
   1. I can't go. I am sick with the flu/ or, my parents are visiting.
   2. I can't go. I have a boyfriend/ or, I have to get high grades and am not dating this semester.
c. Bill missed class and has to explain his absence to the teacher. Which will he say?
   1. I went to the beach/ or, I stayed home to play some video games.
   2. My grandmother died/ or, I was sick.

The reader likely laughed at the "wrong" alternative and will believe that there is little need to support

the presumed selected response by collecting data. It is predicted that respondents, in the same manner as attribution theorists, will choose alternative 2 in describing the choices of others (respectively: internal to increase student pride and achievement strivings; stable to decrease other hope and calling; and uncontrollable to lessen teacher anger and its consequences).

Hence, it indeed appears that the reader and the inferred lay person intuitively grasp the associations postulated by attribution theory. That is, individuals understand what others understand and "there is a community of shared knowledge" among laypersons and between scientists and laypersons. This is consistent with a "grandmother" criticism. In addition, the communicated specific cause is appreciated to be secondary to the dimensional properties of that cause, with each dimension having unique emotional and/or cognitive associations. This knowledge must be shared for excuses to be effective and for transgressors to know when excuses and apologies are warranted and what to communicate.

Although the supporting empirical data are consistent with commonsense and fall within naïve psychology, what the layperson does not realize is that the communications "you are good at these" given pupil success, "I have a boyfriend" for affiliative rejection, and "my grandmother died" when missing class are part of the same theoretical system. The deep structure concerning the fundamental laws of emotion and motivation is not of concern to the layperson but is central to the psychologist seeking to create a parsimonious and generalizable conceptual network. Thus, what is meant by naïve or grandmother psychology is in need of elaboration and clarification. A grandmother at the empirical level need not be a grandmother as the conceptual level!

Further empirical relations concerning emotions

Emotions including pride, hope and hopelessness, and anger and sympathy have been discussed but a systematic theory of emotion from an attribution perspective has yet to be presented. It is first essential to acknowledge that many individuals can rightfully claim the attribution-emotion associations that here I connect with attribution theory. For example, a link has been identified between internal causality and pride and the "discovery" of this association appeared to be credited to attribution theory. Of course, many others not identified with attribution theory have called attention to this association, perhaps dating back to Aristotle. This state of affairs is true of the other cause-emotion relations discussed here.

The general strategy joining emotions with attributions already has been introduced – identify an emotion and tie it with one or more causal dimensions. This is consistent with the position of appraisal theories of emotion, which specify that thoughts are necessary and sufficient antecedents of feeling states. In this case, the attributions and the emotions may relate to the self, such as personal ability leading to pride, or be directed toward others, such as perception of other's lack of effort producing anger.

Thus far, the following associations have been identified:

1. Pride – internal cause to self given self success;
2. Admiration – internal cause to other given success of other;
3. Hopeless – stable cause given failure of self or other;
4. Hope – unstable cause given failure of self or other;
5. Anger – external, controllable (by other) cause given personal failure; internal, controllable cause (by other) given other failure;
6. Sympathy – uncontrollable cause given other failure.

Note that if only one causal dimension is specified for the experience of an emotion, then that emotion is independent of the other dimensions. Hence, for example, pride is aroused given aptitude (internal, stable, and uncontrollable cause) or effort (internal, unstable, and controllable cause) as the attribution for success. In this instance, only internal locus is invariant across the two causes that produce pride. In a similar manner, another failing may elicit sympathy when the failure is caused by lack of other aptitude (internal, stable, and uncontrollable by the failing person) or is due to noisy roommates (external, unstable, and controllable by the roommates but uncontrollable by the failing person). In this instance, only uncontrollable by the individual who is failing is invariant across the two causes and thus is the antecedent for sympathy.

Other emotions also conclusively have causal dimensions as necessary antecedents. Among these emotions are:

7. Gratitude – external and controllable (by other) cause of personal positive outcome (i.e., one is grateful if the other volitionally helped but not if the other was forced to do so).
8. Guilt and regret – internal and controllable cause of personal failure (i.e. guilt and regret tend to be experienced if one "could have done otherwise" but not if there was no volitional choice).

A myriad of other emotions also have causal associations, although these connections may neither be necessary nor sufficient and the empirical conclusions do not warrant the descriptive label of "truth" without further verification. Included in this catalog are:

9. Surprise – unstable causality (e.g., success due to good luck, failure due to bad luck).
10. Shame (humiliation, embarrassment) – internal, uncontrollable causality for self failure (e.g., failure due to low aptitude).
11. Scorn (contempt) – internal to other, uncontrollable causality for other failure (e.g., failure of other caused by lack of aptitude).
12. Pity – stable, uncontrollable causality for other "failure" (e.g., stigma of other such as blindness).

In sum, included among the emotions related to causal beliefs and causal dimensions are admiration, anger, gratitude, guilt (regret), hope, hopelessness, pity, pride, scorn (contempt), shame (embarrassment, humiliation), surprise, and sympathy. Some of the causal dimension-emotion connections are more tenuous and less exclusive than others (e.g., surprise may be aroused by any unexpected event). However, the array and breadth of the emotions documents the powerful connection between causal beliefs, their dimensional properties, and feeling states.

Attribution, Affect, and Action

I now turn attention to motivated behavior, proposing that causes, their characteristics, and their elicited emotional consequences provide a foundation for motivation theory. Two sources or types of motivation are examined here: interpersonal motivation (specifically, help giving) and intrapersonal motivation (specifically, achievement strivings).

Earlier in this paper, a scenario was presented that one's car (or camel) failed to start. The reaction to this presumably unexpected and negative event is to ask "Why?" That is the attribution or causal question. To answer this puzzle, information is likely to be sought. One might inspect the gas gauge of the car, open the hood and examine the battery, perhaps test if the car lights are functioning, and so forth. Assume that the gas gauge indeed points to "empty." The driver quite likely will then obtain gas for the car. This sequence can be depicted as follows, which outlines an attribution approach to motivation that is initiated by an event, involves causal search and beliefs, and ends with a motivated action:

Event (car does not start) → Causal search (gas gauge) → Cause (no gas) → Motivated action (put gas in the tank)

However, as already revealed, in most situations involving human causality there are additional complexities. Primarily, causes have properties that elicit emotions, which must be included within the motivation sequence. The essential additional step is thus to link emotions to action, so that a motivational sequence progresses from thoughts (causal beliefs) to emotions and then to behavior. But for this path to be added, the information already presented is needed.

An attribution theory of interpersonal motivation (help-giving)

Consider, specifically, an attribution analysis of help-giving. It is known that a great many factors influence providing aid to another. These include, for example, the genetic relatedness between the needy person and the potential help-provider, their in-group or out-group membership status, the number of others available to help, the fear generated by the needy person, exposure to prior behavioral models, and on and on. Thus, it might be thought that helping behavior is not a fertile area for attribution theorists inasmuch as help giving is an overdetermined response. But to the contrary, many help-giving studies have been conducted from an attribution perspective and meta-analyses have been performed on the reported findings. Hence, helping others provides a fertile motivation domain to examine evidence regarding the

viability of an attribution approach to motivation and to consider its generalizability to different behaviors.

As noted previously, the basic premise of attribution theory is that, given negative and/or unexpected events, there is a search for causality. Hence, if an individual seeks help, or if there is a general class of people in need of help (e.g., those living in poverty), then there is a desire to know what created the need. As also discussed earlier, there are a variety of perceived causes of, for example, financial need. These include laziness, no available jobs, lack of thrift, low education, illness, and on and on.

Also as already discussed, these causes can be characterized on the basis of their perceived position on the three dimensions of locus, stability, and control. It has been shown that if the cause of a need is under personal control, such as laziness or lack of thrift as causes of poverty, then there are negative emotional reactions from others such as anger, annoyance and resentment. These anti-social emotions elicit "going against" behaviors and help tends to be withheld, hence linking feelings to doing. This sequence is represented as follows:
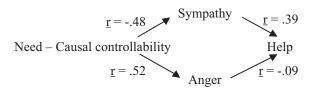
Need (poverty) → Cause(s) (laziness; lack of thrift) → Prime causal dimensions (internal control: controllable by the needy person) → Perceiver emotion (anger) → Action (withhold help, neglect)

On the other hand, given the perception of a cause as uncontrollable by the needy other, such as discrimination or illness, then affective reactions described as pity and sympathy are elicited. "Going toward" or pro-social behaviors are aroused by these emotions, including help-giving. This sequence is depicted as follows:

Need (poverty) → Cause(s): (discrimination; illness) → Causal dimensions (respectively, external, uncontrollable by needy other; internal, uncontrollable by the needy other) → Perceiver emotions (pity, sympathy) → Action (go toward, aid)

These proposed theoretical sequences have been substantiated in a meta-analysis of pertinent research. This meta-analysis (Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004), conducted more than a decade ago, included 39 studies involving more than 8,000 participants. The research participants ranged across a number of cultures; the studies were both simulation and real; and there were a variety of indicators of emotion as well as the type of help given or withheld. The data were subject to path modeling to determine if the postulated sequence, from thinking to feeling to acting, is upheld.

The best fitting model revealed that inferred controllability of a need negatively relates to sympathy $r = -.48$ and positively relates to anger ($r = .52$). That merely repeats what already has been discussed regarding the relations between a causal dimension (controllability) and feeling states: if the person is regarded as at fault for having a need, then little sympathy and much anger is aroused. The next step in the path then reaches from emotion to motivation – sympathy positively relates to help giving ($r = .39$), whereas anger has a small negative association to help ($r = -.09$). Simply put, when another is in need and it is perceived to be his or her own fault, then one does not feel sympathy, is a bit angry, and does not help. On the other hand, if the person is not responsible for the need state, that is, it is not his or her own fault, then one experiences sympathy, no anger, and tends to help. Also of interest, if the relation between perceptions of control and help giving is statistically eliminated from the analysis, then the magnitude of the path model is not weakened. That is, thoughts influence action only through the mediation of feelings. This attribution-based motivation sequence, with statistical values included, is:

It is certainly questionable to conclude that these exact values will be repeated in subsequent meta-analyses. But based on the body of literature, it is more than reasonable to anticipate that similar paths will be repeated. That is, causes tie to emotion, which links to motivation

An attributional theory of intrapersonal motivation (achievement strivings)

An attribution theory of motivation thus far has been examined for observer or interpersonal behavior. One reacts to another; in the above example, toward an individual in need. The theory also can be extended from interpersonal to intrapersonal behavior (e.g. achievement strivings), although insufficient data have been gathered and the proposed motivation sequence is suggestive rather than substantiated.

Consider, for example, an achievement-related event, first from the perspective of an involved observer (the perspective already examined) and then from the viewpoint of the actor or self. Assume that there has been an exam failure and consider the reactions of a parent as a function of the perceived cause (no aptitude versus lack of effort) of the failure. The theoretically expected and to a certain extent substantiated sequences are as follows:

1. Event (failure of child) → Cause (lack of aptitude) → Essential dimensions (internal control: not controllable by child) → Perceiver emotion (sympathy) → Behavioral reaction (go toward: comfort)
2. Event (failure of child) → Cause (lack of effort) → Essential dimensions (internal control: controllable by the child) → Perceiver emotion (anger) → Behavioral reaction (go against: punish)

These sequences are conceptually identical to those set forth when discussing altruism and help giving. Causal understanding and perceptions regarding controllability produce emotions of sympathy or anger, which guides

action, and help-giving as well as aggression can be accounted for within the same theoretical framework.

But now consider the motivated sequence for the acting child who, in the simplest scenario, shares the same causal understanding as the observer (this often is not the case):

1. Event (personal failure) → Cause (lack of aptitude) → Essential dimensions (internal control: not controllable by the self; stability: stable) → Emotions (humiliation; hopeless) → Behavioral reaction (go away from, withdraw).
2. Event (personal failure) → Cause (lack of effort) → Essential dimensions (internal control: controllable by the self; stability: unstable) → Emotions (guilt/regret; hope) → Behavioral reaction (go toward, reparation).

In this intrapersonal example, the emotions (humiliation, guilt/regret, hope, hopeless) are self- rather than other-directed and behavior is depicted as toward or away from a task. Nonetheless, once again the conceptual sequence is identical to what has been proposed – causal thinking gives rise to emotions that produce action. As already intimated, suggestive but not definitive data have been reported in support of this hypothesized motivated episode.

Concluding comments

Attribution theory has left a rich body of empirical knowledge and a strong conceptual foundation for future generations of psychologists. The empirical base includes awareness about the conditions that give rise to causal search, the properties of causes, their linkage to expectancy and a wide array of emotions, and finally to the role causes play within a theory of motivated action. The reported empirical associations between internal locus and pride; causal stability, expectancy, and hope; and causal control and evaluation are certain. In addition, these components fit together to form a theory of behavior in which causal thinking gives rise to feelings, which generate behavior. Perhaps the empirical associations are so secure because they indeed are incorporated within naïve wisdom, whereas the disconfirmed associations reported by psychologists often involve predictions that defy common sense and call upon unconscious mechanisms. For attribution theory, naïveté at the empirical level has not resulted in a conceptual "grandmother psychology," for a rich theory has developed that transcends the "person on the street".

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