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The attribution of causality by teachers and parents to school problem behavior : an empirical test of interacting systems.

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THE ATTRIBUTION OF CAUSALITY BY TEACHERS AND PARENTS

TO SCHOOL PROBLEM BEHAVIOR: AN EMPIRICAL TEST

OF INTERACTING SYSTEMS

A Dissertation Presented

by

SUSAN MARION KENNEDY MARX
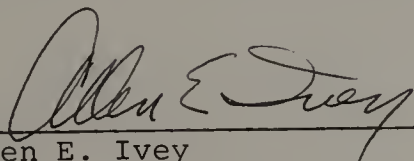
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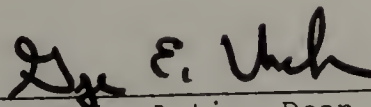
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and later analyses of the data. I am thankful for Martha Zorn's assistance in research as well. Mary Bradford Ivey, Judy Karren, and Bina Goldbarten Addes helped secure data collection sites, pilot the questionnaire, and support me in numerous ways throughout this process. I am thankful for their professional skills as well as their enduring friendship.

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ABSTRACT

THE ATTRIBUTION OF CAUSALITY BY TEACHERS AND PARENTS

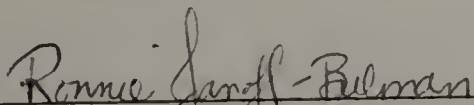TO SCHOOL PROBLEM BEHAVIOR: AN EMPIRICAL TEST

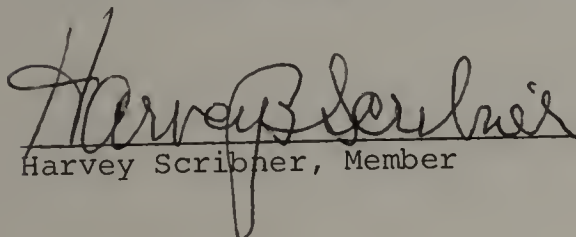OF INTERACTING SYSTEMS

FEBRUARY 1988

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Discrepant preceptions of a shared event have been described by
attribution theorists in social psychology. The effects of divergent
perspectives on the same event have been explored extensively in the
theoretical assertions of systems thinking. This thesis assesses the
perceptual differences of individuals within different but interacting
systems. Teachers' and parents' causal attributions toward the same
problem behavior at school were compared on the basis of a research
methodology rooted in attribution theory. Therefore, this thesis rep-
resents an empirical test of interacting school and family systems.
The research on actor-observer differences and perceptual bias in
attributional behavior was reviewed. The absence of interactive models
was evident from this review. Thus, the present thesis presents a
systemic viewing of attributional behavior among teachers and parents
who judge the cause of the same school problem behavior.

This study compared two groups' (teachers' and parents') assess-
ments of cause to a single incident of problem school behavior. The

effects of incident outcomes (serious or nonserious) were assessed as well. The participants, 42 teachers and 42 parents, read the same four incidents of problem behavior at school. Each subject was presented with two nonserious and two serious incident outcomes. Their presentation was counterbalanced while the vignette order was randomized. Subjects were asked to judge cause and anticipate their response to each incident on the attribution questionnaire instrument. Significant differences between teachers' and parents' assessments of causality and response were found. Parents judged cause to be more in the child than in the situational context surrounding the child. Teachers, however, attributed cause more to external variables. Further, significant effects for serious and nonserious problem outcomes were identified. Serious outcomes resulted in attributions to both internal and external factors. More punitive and child-focused responses were likely when outcomes were serious, as well. The findings are discussed in their relationship to the systemic implications of the attributional model presented.

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GLOSSARY

actor
(participant)
The perceptual focus of action or attention in a shared occurrence. Example: If the school-referred child's behavior is the focus of observers' perceptions, then the child is termed an actor.

attribution
(perceived cause)
The process of interpreting behavior on the basis of one's perceptions and causal inferences.

biases
Factors, cognitive and motivational, which have been shown to systematically and predictably influence the attribution process. L. Ross (1977) defined biases as systematic distortions in judgment. (See counterdefensive attributions, the fundamental attribution error, self-esteem biases, and self-presentation biases, as well.)

blame and control
Attributions of responsibility for a problem may be referred to as the cause or blame. Attributions of responsibility for a solution (in the future) may be referred to as control. This distinction is particularly important to methodological considerations in the actor-observer literature. (Brickman, 1982)

cause and reason
A distinction is made on the basis of cause and reason between the perceptual experiences of actors and observers. Actors are typically focused on justifications or rationales for their behavior. Observers will more likely attend to not only the cause, but also to reason, i.e., sense of responsibility for behavior in the future. (Buss, 1978)

consensus
Consensus occurs when an individual's response is similar to the responses of others to the same stimulus. Attributional confidence is enhanced when a perceiver experiences consensus. Example: A teacher refers a child for counseling. That referral seems more "correct" as other teachers share their recollections of similar occurrences with the referred child.

consistency
The degree to which one's response is similar across different contexts or consistent over time. Example: The teacher saw the referred child behaving inappropriately in a variety of settings. The teacher's confidence in the judgment to refer was based in part on the teacher's assessment of consistency.

counterdefensive attributions

Inferences that occur when a "natural" tendency to defend oneself against failure is overpowered by a concern for others' approval. Counterdefensive attributions appear to be a result of self-presentation needs. Example: A teacher who takes responsibility for a student's failure to increase the likelihood that s/he will be seen as a positive, competent, professional.

covariation model

Kelley (1967) addresses the perceiver's question, "How do I know that my response to a particular stimulus is valid?" Kelley hypothesized that one's judgments about another are based on three sources of information--person, situation, and time. (These dimensions are also described as consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency.) "Behavior varies as a function of who is behaving, what the objects or entities in the situation are, and how the entities are encountered." (Schneider, Hastorf, Ellsworth, 1979).

dispositional attributions

(characterological or internal attributions) Observers are most likely to make personality-trait based inferences. Example: Observers are likely to attribute poor academic performance to the student's ability and effort, i.e., internally determined variables.

distinctiveness

The degree to which an individual's response is associated distinctively with a particular stimulus. Example: Counseling referrals are typically a last resort for this teacher. The referred child's behavior was very different than the teacher's assessment of peer behaviors. It was extreme and intrusive. Therefore the judgment was made to refer this particular child for counseling.

external attributions (situational/ environmental attributions)

Actors tend to attribute behavior, situationally. For the actor, the focus of an event is the external environment rather than dispositional variables. Example: The school-referred child may describe the cause of misbehavior as lack of clear classroom rules, others' prodding, etc.

(the) fundamental attribution error

The fundamental attribution error is a cognitive bias. It is "the tendency for attributers to underestimate the impact of situational factors and to overestimate the role of dispositional factors." (L. Ross, 1977, p. 135)

good school history	A good school history is characterized by high distinctiveness, low consistency, and high consensus (H-L-H).
internal attributions (characterological/dispositional attributions)	Also called person attributions, recently. Observers are most likely to make personality-trait based inferences. Example: Observers are likely to attribute poor academic performance to the student's ability and effort, i.e., internally determined variables.
motivational biases	The systematic and predictable intrusions of a perceiver's needs and wishes on attributions. Two categories are specified here; self-esteem and self-presentation.
nonserious outcome	An incident of problem school behavior that causes a concern worthy of a counseling referral is termed a nonserious outcome. (The incident may in fact be more mildly serious than nonserious.) The outcome however does not cause physical harm to oneself or another nor does it result in academic failure.)
poor school history	A poor school history is characterized by low distinctiveness, high consistency, and low consensus (L-H-L).
primacy effects	(recency) Information that the perceiver integrates first is seen as stable. Later information is assimilated on the basis of that initial impression. Primary effects reflect cognitive-availability biases. Example: The child who enters the school year misbehaving may be perceived in a lasting way in light of that impression. Later, subtle but more positive behavior may not be particularly noticeable.
salience	(vividness) Salience is a significant source of cognitive bias. Certain information about another is impactful and increases an observer's attention to that person. Example: A child who is of an ethnic minority but attends school with children from the majority culture may be salient to observers and inferences may be cognitively biased.

school-referred
child
A child school personnel identify as exhibiting a
behavior problem at school (i.e., aggressive, with-
drawn, low achieving) whose needs are greater than
can be met by school support services, and who is
referred to a community agency for treatment.

self-esteem biases
(self-serving or egocentric biases) Actors describe
their successes as due to their own efforts, abili-
ties, and characteristics and avoid blame for fail-
ures by attributing them to situational variables.
Example: The school-referred child who attributes
misbehavior to peer influences and an unfair
teacher.

self-presentation
biases
Motivational biases which are systematically and
predictably designed to gain approval of others.
Example: A parent takes all responsibility for the
school-referred child's school misbehavior in hopes
that s/he'll be liked and in a sense not blamed.

serious outcome
An incident of school-referred behavior that results
in physical harm to oneself or another or academic
failure is termed a serious outcome.

situational
attributions
(external or environmental attributions) Actors tend
to attribute behavior, situationally. For the
actor, the focus of an event is the external envi-
ronment rather than dispositional variables.
Example: The school-referred child may describe
the cause of misbehavior as lack of clear classroom
rules, others' prodding, etc.

social perception
(interpersonal perception) Perceiver's interpreta-
tions and predictions about one's subjective inter-
action with others and the environment. Example:
The teacher in the school-referral scenario attri-
butes meaning to the child's behavior one way.
External cues, internally motivated biases, and
one's unique way of viewing this child and the world
in general create a high subjective view of reality.

supervisor-
subordinate
interactional
attributions
Performance attributions that result from interac-
tions between supervisors and subordinates are
termed supervisor-subordinate attributions. They
are also called leader/member interactional attri-
butions. Supervisors (or leaders) are biased
towards dispositional explanations of poor perfor-
mance by their subordinates.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Do teachers and parents view the cause of children's behavioral problems differently? A child who is referred for counseling is a part of several systems. Especially important among these are the school system and the parental system. The teacher represents the school whereas the parent is the person who has prime responsibility for childrearing.

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether individuals within different, but interacting, systems perceive causality differently. The problem of the child is shared and necessitates that the teacher and the parent interact. Effective service delivery to the child begins with shared communication around diagnosis and treatment plans. Perceptions of the same problem behavior by teachers and parents may differ greatly, however. The potential for misunderstanding and conflict persists when teacher and parent perspectives remain unclear. It is important to specify how teachers' and parents' causal assessments may differ as both attempt to understand and help the school-referred child.

This study, then, represents a search for patterns among varying perspectives. The process of interpreting behavior on the basis of one's perceptions and causal inferences is termed attribution. Attribution theory provides a framework to explore the process of causal judgments and is a useful model for considering varying responses of teachers and parents to the school-referred child.

Attribution Theory as a Method for Examining Systems

Attribution theory suggests that each of us is a social observer, "an intuitive psychologist who is forced by everyday experience to judge the causes and implications of behavior" (Ross, 1977). Teachers and parents alike are engaged in trying to interpret the school-referred child's behavior. They each represent different but inter-acting systems. One's judgments about problem behavior may be influenced by one's affiliation with a larger system, i.e., school and/or family. Further, the meaning one attaches to another's responses reflects one's self-system. That is, as individuals we are systems. Our judgments and interpretations are based in our history, motivations and perceptions of the world. Both teachers and parents try to explain how and why a particular problem occurs. However, in this common search for predictability, it seems that teachers and parents experience fundamentally different perceptions of the same school behavior. They each attribute meaning to the child's behavior differently.

Attribution theory guides this viewing of teacher and parent perspectives on the school-referred child. Attribution theory is the study of social perception and the basic processes (information, beliefs, and motivations) an individual uses to make judgments about a complex interpersonal world. The theoretical assertions and related research findings provide a well established structure for what has been a vaguely conceived problem. Attribution theorists have researched differing perceptions and varying responses to shared problems extensively. Their findings on perceptual biases are central

to a focused study of differing perspectives within interacting systems.

The foundations of attribution theory reflect early theorists' needs to replace an intuitive understanding with one firmly based in fact. The brief overview that follows highlights those initial guiding assertions as they relate to discrepancies among those who view the same event. The work of Jones and Davis (1965), H. Kelley (1973), Jones and Nisbett (1972), and L. Ross (1977) is of pivotal importance to the study of attributional behavior and so is noted here. Mitchell and Wood's (1980) research is overviewed in more detail. Their research and methodology are fundamental to this dissertation and so receive more emphasis in the discussion that follows. Our overview concludes with a brief reference to Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn and Kidder (1982). Brickman et al. are responsible for a major contribution in attribution theory. The authors identified the need for more systemic models in attribution theory. Further, they described an interactive model of helper behavior within larger systems. Thus, their efforts to enrich helpers' views of the individual within the context of larger systems will refocus on the major premise of this dissertation. Now, let us turn our attention to guiding suppositions presented by theorists, earlier.

Jones and Davis (1965) were among the first researchers who struggled to define the relationship of the perceiver to the surrounding context. It is this relationship which systems theory seeks to define. They presented their Correspondent Inference Model in 1965 and made a

distinction between perceivers as actors or as observers. Actors, they suggested, behave with purposeful intention and their behavior has effects. Those who observe an actor's behavior infer cause from those effects, asserted Jones and Davis. The role of the observer, then, is to understand what the actor intends by a particular behavior. The process of inferring cause leads to the formulation of corresponding character traits. Thus, the Correspondence Inference Model presumes that a personality trait is attached to an actor by an observer and that it corresponds to the observed behavior.

H. Kelley (1967) described the perceiver's relationship to others, within a broader context, soon after the Jones and Davis study. H. Kelley presented a detailed viewing of attributional theories in 1967 and 1973. H. Kelley initially described the attributer as a rather sophisticated information processor. His three-dimensional theory sup-posed that behavior seems to vary as a function of who is behaving, what the objects in the situation are, and how those objects or enti-ties are encountered. The attributer's perceptions will tend to be more internal (dispositional) or external (situational) on the basis of particular informational assessments (i.e., consistency, distinctive-ness, and consensus).

In 1973, H. Kelley presented another model that stated causal attributions are a result of a detailed, logical sorting of information coupled with one's world view. His writings in 1967 and 1973 addressed the role of actors and observers in social perception. The importance of the distinction between one's role in a given situation was noted

repeatedly. However, it was Jones and Nisbett (1972) and L. Ross (1977) who established the research literature on actor-observer discrepancies in viewing.

Jones and Nisbett (1972) argued that a fundamental distinction can be made between the way actors and observers interpret a shared event. The authors hypothesize that one's role in a particular event either as an actor or observer, influences the cognitive and motivational processing of that occurrence. Actors tend to attribute responsibility to situational (external) factors, while observers see the same behavior as due to stable personality dispositions (internal). This pattern, identified by Jones and Nisbett, offered an influential explanation of perceptual discrepancies. Further, it stimulated further suppositions and research.

Jones and Nisbett raised the issue of biases and motives as sources of discrepant perceptions. But, L. Ross (1977) reformulated this issue of a systematic and predictable cognitive bias. L. Ross terms "the tendency for attributers to underestimate the impact of situational factors and to overestimate the role of dispositional factors" (1977, p. 135) the fundamental attribution error.

In 1980, Mitchell and Wood presented a model and a methodology that drew on the earlier assertions of Jones and Davis, H. Kelley, Jones and Nisbett, and L. Ross. Mitchell and Wood identified a specific group of actors (nurses) and a related group of observers (nursing supervisors). They designed a methodology that addressed the causal judgments of observers towards actors in an occurrence of problem

behavior. That is, they investigated nursing supervisors' causal judgments about mistakes made by nurses (their subordinates) onwards. The authors devised a highly useful methodology that allows theorists to look at differences between groups--and not just individuals. Mitchell and Wood's research is the foundation of this dissertation and so an overview of their study follows.

Mitchell and Wood varied the kind and extent of information nursing supervisors had on which to make their causal judgments. For instance, one problem incident involved a nurse with a poor work history who made a relatively serious error in dealing with a patient. Another incident of problem behavior involved a nurse with a good work history who made a similarly serious error. A third problem incident presented to nursing supervisors offered them no information on the nurse's work history. Mitchell and Wood found that varying the kind of work history presented did influence attributions and responses. Also, they found that supervisors made more internal than external attributions, in general. That is, they perceived the cause of problem behavior in the person rather than in the situation, most often. Finally, Mitchell and Wood reported that attributions were more frequently internal and responses more personally punitive when the consequences of the nurse's problem behavior were more serious as opposed to less.

Finally, Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn and Kidder (1982) focused their work more systemically, as did Mitchell and Wood. Brickman et al. and Mitchell and Wood both represent a departure from more traditional attributions. Mitchell and Wood targeted an

interactional research methodology while Brickman et al. focused on a

systems theory within attribution theory.

Brickman et al. addressed helping behavior and assessments of re-

sponsibility for problems and their solutions. The authors defined

models of helping behavior (moral, compensatory, medical, and enlight-

enment) and tied those to helpers' views of another, when the other is

the focus of a problem. For example, helpers in the public schools

have operated from a "medical model," traditionally. Teachers assess

the nature of a child's educational problem, initially. Then, they

define a course of action or medically speaking, a treatment. Success-

ful "cures" are determined by the experts in education, generally

speaking. Children are not held responsible for solutions, for the

most part.

Three questions follow as we consider helper-helpee interactions

from Brickman's theoretical perspective. First, is there an effective

match between the helper's model and the helpee's need? Second, is the

focus ahead to a solution or less progressively, to the cause of the

problem? Third, are the assumptions and motives of helping behavior

examined systemically? Brickman et al. defined a systemic view of

helping behavior within attribution theory. Mitchell and Wood, on the

other hand, provided an empirical, interactional measure from the

social inference perspective.

In summary, the theoretical contributions of Jones and Davis,

Kelley, Jones and Nisbett, L. Ross, Mitchell and Wood, and Brickman et

al. circumscribe our attributional understanding of the problem of the

school-referred child. Early theorists established a body of litera-
ture that identified the critical issues of the perceiver in relation
to the external world.

Jones and Davis formulated their Correspondent Inference Model.
Judgments about another's intentions were central to their assertions.
H. Kelley presented the perceiver as an information processor sorting
through cues that help one make sense of another's behavior. Jones and
Nisbett and L. Ross defined the errors or biases that altered the objec-
tive perceptual experience defined by H. Kelley, earlier.

Mitchell and Wood and Brickman et al. focused their efforts on
linking attribution theory with its practical applications. Mitchell
and Wood presented a research design that allows empirical assessments
of perceptual differences, interactionally. That methodological design
has broad utility for attribution theorists and systems thinkers, alike.
Brickman et al. suggested that effective helping behavior depended upon
a more systemic theoretical perspective on attribution. Distinctions
between causal assessments and problem solutions were central to
Brickman's view, as well.

These authors' theoretical assertions and research methodology
contribute directly to the concerns of this dissertation. Bridging the
gap between theory and practice is the foundation of their work and the
focus, here, as well. Let us continue looking at the adaptation of
these assertions, then, to systems' interactions around the school-
referred child.

School Systems and Parental Systems

This dissertation adapts the model and design presented by Mitchell and Wood to teachers' and parents' attributions towards problem children. Teachers and parents (our supervisors/observers) make judgments about children's (our subordinates/actors) problem school behaviors. No information on a problem child's past school performance was presented to either group (teachers or parents). Consequences of the child's behavior, on the other hand, were either serious or nonserious. Combinations of the no information on history variable and serious or nonserious outcomes of problem behavior paralleled those presented in the Mitchell and Wood design.

It was predicted that both teachers and parents would be influenced by the cognitive bias L. Ross termed the fundamental attribution error. That is, attributers whether they are teachers or parents will overestimate dispositional (internal) factors and underestimate the role of situational factors.

However, teachers were predicted to be more "typical" supervisors than were parents. That is, teachers were seen as more likely to see the problem "in the child" than were parents. Further, teachers' responses were predicted to be more internally than externally focused.

Parents, on the other hand, were predicted to make more external attributions and responses regarding specific incidents of problem behavior. A parent was expected to behave attributionally more like an actor (the school-referred child) than an observer or typical

supervisor. Parents were expected to see the problem in the <u>situation</u> and the teacher was imagined to be an important part of that situation.

This dissertation, then, is guided by the theoretical assertions and research methodology of leaders in the field of social perception. The methodology here is patterned after Mitchell and Wood's study (1980). However, this study addresses, empirically, the issue of differences in attributions of causality between interacting groups. Do teachers and parents, as supervisors "sharing" children, actually perceive causality differently? It is assumed here that helpers, whether teachers or parents, attempt to attach meaning to a child's problem behavior. Assumptions, discrepant as they may be, are made by teachers and parents and those assumptions guide problem definitions. Treatment decisions are a result of problem definitions. If assumptions are shared between teachers and parents, then the likelihood of joint decisions about treatment is increased. Effective treatment for the school-referred child is the larger goal shared by teachers, parents, and community therapists.

The major premise is that teachers and parents judge cause and respond differently to the same school problem behavior. Discrepant views on the school-referred child have been vaguely defined, thus far. This dissertation will assess attributional patterns among those who interact and share the concerns of the school-referred child. Those patterns are expected to be influenced by teachers' affiliation with the larger school system and parents' relationships with their family

system. We are mindful of the effects of one's unique history, motivations, and perceptions of the world as we proceed, as well.

Teachers' and parents' differing perceptions of a shared problem occurrence at school will be tested by seven hypotheses. Each hypothesis is specified at the conclusion of the next chapter. All hypotheses attempt to delineate what differences may occur in teachers' and parents' perceptions of the school-referred child. The predictable patterns of those differences are of central interest, here. For instance, where do teachers and parents variously focus when a problem occurs at school? Does one group assess cause and respond to the child, while the other focuses on more situational aspects? Further, how does a serious or nonserious problem outcome influence attributional behavior? Finally, how typical are teachers and parents as supervisors in a relationship with children experiencing a problem at school? The hypotheses were constructed with these central questions in mind.

This dissertation attempts to measure systems' interactions on the basis of findings from attributional theory. The communications between school systems and parental systems are viewed from teachers' and parents' assessments of cause and response to the same school problem.

The process of attaching meaning to events around us is basic to our discussion of teacher and parent perceptions of the school-referred child. How we arrive at our various understandings of the same event is the focus of the literature review that follows in Chapter II.

Plan of Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation is as follows: The disserta-
tion consists of five chapters. The first introduces the central
problem. That is, do teachers and parents view the cause of children's
behavioral problems differently? The problem of the child is shared,
but teachers' and parents' causal assessments may differ. Effective
service delivery to the school-referred child begins with shared commu-
nication around diagnosis and treatment plans. Chapter I outlines our
need to search for patterns among varying perspectives.

The second chapter guides our understanding of the problem of
varying perspectives on the same school-referred child. Pertinent
literature from attribution theory is extensively reviewed. The asser-
tions of major theorists including H. Kelley, Jones and Nisbett,
L. Ross, and T. Mitchell are presented with a view towards teachers and
parents as supervisors of children. Chapter II concludes with the
hypotheses tested.

Chapter III presents the methodology of the research. The chapter
includes the procedures used for selecting subjects. Pilot tests of
the instrument are detailed, as well. Procedures for gathering the
data and completing the statistical analyses are discussed and conclude
the chapter.

The fourth chapter integrates the results of the study and the
discussion of those findings. Each of the seven hypotheses tested is
separately presented with all related analyses reported. A discussion
of the findings for each hypothesis follows. The discussion includes

implications for our consideration of interactions around the school-referred child. Further, it includes theoretical understandings from relevant research in attribution and limitations that are likely to be present.

The thesis will end in Chapter V with the presentation of a publishable article based on the empirical study.

Before turning to Chapter II, I would like to add a brief note. Attribution theory has developed a very specialized and precise social psychological language. To ensure clarity of communication, the reader is asked to note that a glossary of key terms is included.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DERIVATION OF HYPOTHESES

A central question guides our consideration of the literature re-
view. That is, how does attribution theory relate to schools, parents,
and eventually community agencies in their joint desire to alleviate
distress in the child and the surrounding systems designed to facili-
tate child growth?

Earlier, we mentioned that attribution theorists describe per-
ceivers as intuitive psychologists. We are forced to judge the causes
and implications of everyday occurrences on limited information. Many
of us "know" (intuitively) that teacher and parent perspectives on a
problem child are different. We might expect them even to be conflict-
ing. Attribution theory takes us a step beyond our intuitive knowledge
about daily events. The theory offers particular understandings about
discrepancies in our perceptions of a shared occurrence.

An early theoretical model by Jones and Nisbett opens the litera-
ture review. The model predicts that actors and observers in an event
will experience that event differently. Perceptions are tied to one's
role as a participant or observer in an occurrence. Next, preliminary
findings regarding teachers' perceptions of problem children in school
are presented. A major part of the review focuses on Mitchell's model
and methodology. It is an innovative and highly useful research
methodology. Mitchell's model allows us to look at critical factors
influencing the causal judgments teachers and parents make about the

school-referred child. Mitchell's design provides a research framework

for comparing teachers' and parents' attributions and responses to the

school-referred child.

This literature review, then, proceeds as follows: (1) an early

model of divergent perspectives on the same event is overviewed;

(2) research findings regarding teachers' perceptions of problem chil-

dren in school are presented; (3) current research directions and

methodological considerations in the study of varying perceptions of

the same event are discussed; (4) a model of supervisors' attributions

and responses to problem subordinates is presented; (5) an empirical

test of the supervisor-subordinate model is summarized; and (6) the

relationship of this model of supervisor-subordinate interactions to

teacher and parent exchanges regarding a school-referred child is

clarified.

Actor/Observer Discrepancies in Viewing:
An Early Theoretical Contribution

Early directions in research on perceptual discrepancies were

established by Jones and Nisbett (1972). Their writings address the

different perceptual experiences of people witnessing the same event.

The authors' theoretical perspective on perceptual differences is known

as the Jones-Nisbett Model. They argue that a fundamental distinction

can be made between the way actors and observers interpret a shared

event (see pp. 11-12). Jones and Nisbett (1972) hypothesize that one's

role in a given situation, either as an actor or observer, influences

the cognitive and motivational processing of the occurrence. For

example, let us assume the school-referred child is the actor. All others involved are the observers.* On the basis of Jones and Nisbett's assertions, it is likely that the child as actor attributes problem behavior to situational factors. The teacher may be blamed, bothersome peers in the classroom may be implicated, or perhaps the student sees the parents at fault. But it is unlikely that the school-referred child attributes problem behavior to him or herself. However, according to Jones and Nisbett, observers of the same school-referred child likely attribute responsibility to the child while referring to a particular personality trait he or she exhibits. Thus, actors tend to attribute responsibility to situational factors, while observers see the same behavior as due to stable personality dispositions. However, the fundamental attribution error (L. Ross, 1977) may impact both teachers and parents and is important to consider.

The fundamental attribution error is the tendency for attributers to underestimate the impact of situational factors and to overestimate the role of dispositional factors in controlling behavior. L. Ross (1977) notes that we, as intuitive psychologists, "too readily infer broad personal dispositions and expect consistency in behavior or outcomes across widely disparate situations and contexts" (p. 135).

Actor/observer differences and the fundamental attribution error cause us to reconsider teachers and parents as observers and

*The positions of actor and observer rotate. The child is the focus of attention or action in the incidents. Thus, the child is called the actor. However, if the parents become the central focus of attention, they rotate into the actor role.

supervisors of children. Let us look at findings as they inform us about one group, teachers, as we continue. Some fundamentally important questions guide our thinking about how teachers make sense out of persistent problem behavior with a student. Whom do they "blame"? Whom do they imagine to be responsible for solutions? What predictable biases may come into play as interaction and communication take place? The following studies highlight research directions on teacher attributions.

Teacher Perceptions of Problem Children: Considerations Highlighted Through Research Findings

Teachers' attributions to school-referred children were the focus of a study conducted by Medway in 1979. Medway's central concerns were teachers' beliefs about and behavior toward children they referred from their classroom for psychological services. The complex interactions of teachers and school-referred children were viewed from a cognitive perspective. Medway drew on aspects of Kelley's model (1967) to argue his initial ideas and later his findings. Let us briefly summarize what his studies found before aspects of Kelley's model are applied.

Referring teachers saw a student's ability, degree of motivation, and acceptance of responsibility for trying to succeed as most responsible for problems at school. Characteristics within the child were seen as the primary cause of learning and behavior difficulties. Home and background factors were seen as moderately responsible. Teaching methods and classroom environment were seen as least responsible. When learning and behavior problem children were looked at separately,

differences in teachers' perceptions were apparent. Children referred because of learning difficulties were frequently seen as needing special assistance to compensate for ability, perceptual deficits, etc. Children, however, who were referred because their behavior was unacceptable were most often seen as products of problem home situations. Cause was attributed to internal factors in both groups--but children with behavioral difficulties were much more likely than children with learning problems to be seen as reflecting a troubled home situation.

Teachers did not spontaneously mention causes dealing with their own teaching. Medway asserts that teachers' lack of acceptance of responsibility for problem behavior can be adequately explained by applying Kelley's cognitive analysis model.

Atypical classroom behavior, according to Kelley, is highly distinctive. Most children learn and behave within a "normal" range. Problem behavior is highly consistent as well. A referral usually implies that a learning or behavior problem has not changed over time. Finally, a referring teacher may have consulted with other colleagues and received consensual validation for his or her opinion. Thus, distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus can be applied to referring teachers' responses. Theorists disagree as to whether this informational analysis fully describes the complex relationship between teacher attributions and student behaviors. Medway (1979) says it does. Bradley (1978), on the other hand, asks if teachers generally deny personal responsibility for failure to preserve their self-image.

Medway and Bradley's queries reflect the two major paths to research in actor-observer differences in perception: cognitions and motives.

The effects of the self-esteem and self-presentation biases in the discrepant perceptions of actors and observers are unclear. Findings in the area of motivational biases are particularly difficult to assess reliably. Johnson, Feigenbaum, and Weiby (1964) and Beckman (1970, 1976) reported findings that appeared to support the self-esteem hypothesis. Teachers mentioned their own efforts more in accounting for children's success than for children's failure. Additionally, Beckman (1970) and Johnson, Feigenbaum, and Weiby (1964) noted that teachers avoided blame for a student's failure by attributing it to the situation or personality traits of the child.

Beckman's findings (1976) have additional relevance to our consideration of the school-referred child. The author compared teachers' attributions of their students' performance with parent attributions of the same child's achievement. In a questionnaire that included both structured and open-ended questions, she asked why the child performed as s/he did. Teachers never spontaneously mentioned their own teaching as a factor influencing their student's performance in the open-ended questions. In contrast, parents rated the teacher's role of greater importance in accounting for children's performance than did teachers. These different attributional perceptions were significant.

We begin to consider aspects of role and relationship in differing attributional perceptions of teachers and parents. The role and thus the relationship of teachers and parents with the school-referred child

differ. Are there aspects of this that contribute to discrepancies in viewing a problem incident at school? This topic will be addressed further in a later section of this review.

In summary, the literature on attributional behavior regarding teacher and/or parent perceptions of a school-referred child is minimal. New methods which allow for a more systemic, comparative viewing are needed. The following segment directs us to new ways of thinking about the study of divergent perspectives in attribution.

Current Research Directions in Divergent Perspectives on the Same Event

Buss (1978) and Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, and Kidder (1982) articulate a growing edge for researchers in the actor-observer literature. They offer new, more complex, and productive ways of viewing perceptual discrepancies. Let us begin a look ahead with a review of Buss's article.

Buss considers a distinction between cause and reason important to the study of actor-observer differences. Buss questions the theoretical notion that originated with Heider (1958) that individuals make exclusively causal attributions. Buss speculates that some perceivers are more focused on an end--a justification or a rationale for a particular behavior.

Actors are often asked to give a reason explanation rather than a causal one. For example, a teacher (actor) may explain that the school-referred child needs help now so that s/he will be normal and well-adjusted in the future. The action of focus, the referral,

represents an intentional behavior on the part of the teacher. Buss

refers to that behavior as an action by the actor.

An observer experiencing that same referral is involved in what

Buss terms an occurrence. The referral happens to the child (in this

case, the observer). The observer, according to Buss, will typically

respons to both cause and reason.

Buss's central point is that in order to talk meaningfully about

actor-observer differences, the cause-reason distinction ought to be

made. The actor and the observer may be engaged in fundamentally dif-

ferent situations when each attempts to explain the same action.

Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn, and Kidder (1982) spe-

cify another critical distinction that warrants consideration in the

literature of actor-observer differences in attributions. The authors

suggest that helping behavior can best be understood by differentiating

between attributions of responsibility for a problem (who is to blame

for a past event) and attributions of responsibility for a solution

(who is to control future events). Brickman et al. introduce their

position with three questions. First, what happens when people try to

help? Second, why are helpers successful less often than they'd like

to be? Third, do the assumptions made by the helper coincide with the

assumptions made by the helpee--the individual who is trying to cope

with the problem?

These questions are indeed important to attributional theorists in

social psychology. They are critical, too, in counseling psychology

and have been previously raised and addressed (Ivey and Authier, 1971,

1978; Ivey, 1983). Helper-helpee congruence in interactions is an overarching goal of Ivey's micro-counseling theory. Attention to the helpee's worldview and his/her unique response to a problem are central to the model. In 1978, Ivey and Authier spoke of bridging the gap between theory and practice. In 1982, Brickman et al. emphasized a similar need. They wrote of creating a bridge between the methods of clinical and social psychologists.

We are looking at the school-referred child within a network of helpers. Brickman et al. suggest that the form helping behavior takes can be determined by how attributions of responsibility for problems and solutions are made. (The authors' attempt is clearly to make a connection between attribution theory and its practical application.)

Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn, and Kidder (1982) hypothesize that models which hold people responsible for solutions (the compensatory and moral models) are more likely to increase people's competence than models which do not hold people responsible for solutions (medical and enlightenment models). Further, attribution of responsibility for progress or a solution appears more important than attribution of responsibility for the problem. That is, a sense of control over future events seems more important than assignment of blame for past events. Janoff-Bulman and Brickman (1982) found that individuals who have a strong sense of self-esteem or high expectations for success are more likely to assume responsibility for solving prob-lems. Actors whom the authors refer to as high status seem to make solutions more likely by taking an active role in exploring the problem.

Brickman et al. (1982) describe a framework which exceeds the traditional attribution model. Causal considerations in attribution lead theorists to emphasize the origins of a problem. Assessments of responsibility for those origins (blame) are common in the methodology of attribution. The authors recommend a refocusing on assessment of responsibility for future events, i.e., who might be in control of events? It is their belief that perceivers are more interested in controlling events than in understanding them.

Assumptions guide problem definitions. Problem definitions precede treatment decisions. If assumptions are shared among interacting helpers, then the likelihood of joint decisions around treatment is increased. Effective treatment for the school-referred child is the larger goal shared by educators, therapists, and parents.

Attribution has been applied in a very limited way to groups and interacting systems. Shared decision making is critical among members of the helping team working with the school-referred child. Do helpers attend to the outcomes of their divergent perspectives? Is one's membership in a system (i.e., school or family) related to one's perception of the problem? Current leaders in the field, Buss, Janoff-Bulman, and Brickman, offer new and expanded directions in research.

Buss brought our attention to the important distinction between cause and reason. Brickman suggests that causal judgments can better be understood by adding another dimension to our thinking about them. Assessment of responsibility for problem solutions, in Brickman's estimation, is a critical addition to attribution questions. Janoff-Bulman

extends attribution research beyond judgments of cause, as well. She suggests the desire for future control, one's view of the world and attribution are closely intertwined.

The complex and interactive nature of the attribution process is stressed by current leaders in the field. Martinko and Gardner (1987) propose (as do Green and Mitchell (1979) and Mitchell and Wood (1980)) that biases in the attributional process may be an important source of perceptual conflict. They note that attributions to unstable (external) causes create an expectation that future behavior can change, whereas attributions to stable (internal) causes lead to expectations that success or failure will continue. The implications for teacher and parent attributions toward the problem child at school are evident.

Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich (1985) address differences in perspective on the same event more systemically. They define the term "bias" as: "A bias in the interpretation and explanation of events is a subjective tendency to prefer one interpretation over another; such an interpretation may or may not be an error according to some 'objective' criterion for assessing the event" (1985, p. 80). The authors assert that in a group of supervisors and subordinates, observers are generally prone to overestimate the impact of leader behavior in their explanations of events. However, they point out that when some aspect of behavior is seen as bad (or good), then individuals make some attributions to all relevant sources. Thus, teacher and parent causal assessments may not be as distinct as we might have expected on the basis of earlier findings in actor/observer differences.

Next Mitchell and Green's (1979) interactive model of supervisor-subordinate interactions is presented. It is a methodological model that allows us to look at assessments of cause and response. Further, it integrates the actor/observer literature with the questions we have about the impact of role on attributional behavior. Let us turn to Mitchell's model of supervisor-subordinate interactions.

An Attributional Model: Supervisor-Subordinate Interactions

Early research in attribution theory emphasized assessments of cause of (past) problem origins, primarily. Mitchell and Green (1979) responded to more current research directions. That is, they took into account responses (attempts to solve problems) in the model and methodology they presented.

Mitchell's model* was presented in the field of organizational behavior in 1979 (Green and Mitchell). The authors contend that the two part attributional model is helpful to understanding supervisor-subordinate interactions. When a subordinate makes a mistake, certain informational cues (biased as they may be) result in attributional assessments by a supervisor. Causal judgments, Green and Mitchell speculate, lead to particular related responses. It is helpful to keep in mind that Mitchell's model is appropriate to broader categories of supervisors (or leaders) and subordinates (or students). Let us

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*The attributional model of leader-subordinate interactions was presented by Green and Mitchell in 1979. It was empirically tested by Mitchell and Wood in 1980. It will be referred to as Mitchell's model throughout the remainder of this paper.

present the development of the model (Green and Mitchell, 1979) with

that consideration.

Attribution researchers argue that understanding and predicting

how people will react to events around them is enhanced by knowing what

their causal explanations of those events are. Green and Mitchell

(1979) present attribution theory as a vehicle to understand supervisor

behavior in supervisor-subordinate interactions.* The authors present

a model for looking at causes and responses in the supervisor-

subordinate context. Green and Mitchell contend that an attributional

approach to supervisor-subordinate interactions is appropriate and use-

ful for several reasons. First, it allows us to explore the relation-

ship of influence and behavior change. Individuals often assess cause

before attempting to change someone else's behavior. Supervisors, in

particular, "try to figure out what causes a member's behavior before

choosing a means of influence to try to change that behavior" (Green

and Mitchell, 1979, p. 430).

Second, there is evidence to suggest that supervisors see them-

selves as naive information processors. Individuals "in charge" of

others operate in uncertain and changing environments, "seeking infor-

mational cues as to causal relationships, and acting on those causal

analyses" (Green and Mitchell, 1979, p. 430). Earlier, Kelley (1967,

1972a, 1973) articulated his view of the attributer as an information

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*Supervisor-subordinate interactions are also called leader-member
and leader-subordinate interchanges. We will refer to supervisor-
subordinate interactions. That terminology is most directly applicable
to teacher and parent interactions around the school-referred child.

processer. Aspects of Kelley's models serve as a firm basis for empirical propositions about the supervisor-subordinate interaction. Green and Mitchell extend Kelley's theoretical analyses so they can be empirically tested.

Third, social scientists continue to grapple with the relationship of assessments of cause and predictions of actual responses. Individuals judge cause and directly report those assessments, frequently. However, the relationship between attributions and the responses that follow remains unclear. Green and Mitchell argue that attributions offer important information about the relationship between leadership situations and supervisors' behavioral responses.

The model presented by Green and Mitchell (1979) is built on findings from multiple theoretical strands in attribution and organizational leadership research. Kelley (1967, 1972a, 1973), Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, West, and Rosenbaum (1972), and Jones and Nisbett's (1972) assertions are central to the model's development. Their findings will focus our application of Mitchell's model to the school-referred child.

The writings of Kelley and Jones and Nisbett are referred to earlier in the literature review. We will briefly review the central assumptions of each as they support Mitchell's model, however. Additionally, Weiner's model of achievement-related attributions will be summarized.

An Important Contribution to Mitchell's Model:
Kelley's Covariation Model

Kelley's theory is pertinent to the first link in Mitchell's model. Kelley poses two questions as he considers attributional behavior. First, what are the major classes of information an individual seeks in making attributions? Second, what are the processes that are called upon in forming attributions? Let us refer to the interactions around the school-referred child as we address Kelley's questions.

The teacher, as Kelley's naive information processor, considers a particular problem behavior. Let us say, it is the marked withdrawn and very shy affect of a child in the teacher's class. The teacher, according to Kelley, will categorize the causes of the child's behavior into three source dimensions (person, entity, or context) before arriving at an attribution. Thus, the teacher will try to determine if the child's withdrawn behavior is caused by something about the child (person), by a task the child is being asked to do (entity), or by some unique set of circumstances surrounding the child in the classroom (context). An attribution is arrived at by applying a principle of covariation between potential causes and effects.

Information concerning distinctiveness, consistency and consensus highlights what Kelley terms covariation data. That is, the teacher in the example above tries to determine if the withdrawn behavior is distinctive in response to a particular task. The teacher considers other situations in which the child has been seen and decides how consistent this behavior is with other behaviors recalled. Finally,

the teacher tries to determine how unique the child's behavior is (low consensus) or how common it is to many children (high consensus). The teacher's information processing in the example above illustrates Kelley's model. The next step by a supervisor (teacher or parent) is to use the causal explanations as a guide to responses in the supervisor-subordinate interaction. Thus, assessments, informal as they may be, of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus have far reaching implications.

A Second Contribution to Mitchell's Model: Weiner's Model of Achievement-Related Attributions

The focus of attributional behavior in communications around the school-referred child is on the student's "problem." Achievement, whether academic or behavioral, is consistent with school expectations. Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest, and Rosenbaum (1972) propose that individuals utilize few main elements to explain and predict outcomes of achievement-related tasks. They are ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. These four classifications are seen as representing two other dimensions: stability and locus of control. Leaders, according to Weiner et al., make quick attributional analysis of subordinates on the basis of this causal schema. Leaders' responses to subordinates' behavior are mediated by judgments about stability and locus of control hypothesize Weiner et al.

Let us return to our illustration as we explore Weiner's assertions further. We are trying to understand the teacher's attributional thinking about the withdrawn child. How the teacher perceives the

causes of the child's behavior has clear implications for exchanges that take place between the teacher, child, and parent.

There are many biases that operate on what might otherwise be objective analyses of situations around us. Weiner and Kukla (1970) report that assessments of _effort_ are particularly critical to behavior evaluations and subsequent rewards or punishments. The school-referred child who is seen as highly capable but not trying will likely receive the sharpest criticism or harshest "punishment" by the teacher. (The child whose successful achievement is accompanied by effort, on the other hand, is likely to be evaluated most positively.)

A Third Theoretical Contribution to Mitchell's Model: Jones-Nisbett Model of Actor and Observer Differences

Interactions around the school-referred child are also influenced by what we know about actor-observer differences. ". . . considerable research indicates a basic difference in the causal attributions of observers (our leaders) and actors (our members)" (Green and Mitchell, 1979, p. 439). Jones and Nisbett (1972) presented a theoretically defensible and highly readable article on the differing perceptions of actors and observers who witness the same event. "There is a pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their actions to situational require-ments, whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to stable personal dispositions," assert Jones and Nisbett (1972, p. 80). There are powerful cognitive and motivational forces impelling actors and observers to differentially perceive the same event. Observers, then, typically explain others' behaviors internally (e.g., effort or

ability) whereas actors attribute their own behavior to situational causes. It is expected that the supervisor will interpret the subordinate's behavior from an observer's perspective in the supervisor-subordinate relationship.

Further, when supervisors make internal attributions, we would expect their responses to focus on the subordinate. External attributions, on the other hand, focus the supervisor on elements of the situation. Thus, it is crucial whether a supervisor sees a subordinate's performance as caused by internal or external factors. Green and Mitchell note that the observer bias may be an important source of difficulty in supervisor-subordinate communications. It seems likely that there is a natural tendency for supervisors to use internal attributions to explain subordinate's behavior. Responses, then, may frequently reflect that perceptual bias and contribute to conflicting perspectives.

A Key Variable in Perceptions of Cause: Supervisor-Subordinate Relationship

There are many sources of bias which may operate in a given situation to disrupt an objective causal analysis. It is important to consider the effects of the relationship of a supervisor and a subordinate. Parent and teacher relationships with the same child are likely to be quite different. Aspects of those relationships may predictably influence divergent attributions that parents and teachers may make. For example, a teacher likely shares a more psychologically distant relationship with a child than does the child's parent. Psychological

distance may be an integral part of the teacher's role. Status or power and the responsibility for formal evaluations may dictate a more psychologically distant relationship between teacher and student.

The parent-child relationship may reflect more psychological closeness on the other hand. Psychological closeness, measured by feelings of empathy, similarity, and liking may be a factor that differentially influences teacher and parent perceptions.

Empathy, similarity, and liking may reduce the actor-observer bias (Regan and Totten, 1975). Observers were encouraged to be empathic while they observed and focused on a targeted person in Regan and Totten's study. They found that empathic observers attributed cause more like actors than like the typical observers. Thus, when one shared the emotional responses of the person observed, causal judgments tended to be situational.

Empathic, similar and affable feelings are also tied to judgments of good and bad. Attributions are influenced by one's perceptions of another's behavior as good (positive) or bad (negative). Jones and Davis, as early as 1965, noted that inappropriate behavior is more strongly attributed to character traits than is socially acceptable behavior. Additionally, Taylor and Kouvimaki (1976) identified an associated cognitively based bias. Perceivers most often see people as causing good behaviors and situations as causing bad ones.

The relationship between attitudes and attributions is complex. Cognitive and motivational biases come into play as we consider teacher and parent (supervisor) perceivers of the school-referred child

(subordinate). Whether a perceiver likes the school-referred child is significant. Regan, Straus, and Fazio (1974) found that whether one is liked or disliked by another makes important, observerable differences in attributions. The authors noted that when an observer liked another, then the actor's good behaviors were attributed internally. Less desirable behaviors by liked actors were attributed externally.

Finally a study by Banks (1976) proposes a way of looking at the variations in behavior among particular observers. Banks (1976) expanded on Jones and Nisbett's actor-observer dichotomy. Banks asserted that while self (or actor) is a singular entity, others (or observers) may vary tremendously. Banks states, "a continuum may exist along which various actors will fall nearer or farther from the observer, and along which observer attributions may be expected to vary from relatively situational to dispositional" (p. 137). Banks further noted that causal attributions vary as a function of perceived similarity. Similarity may refer to ascribed characteristics such as sex, ethnic origin, etc. Assessments of similarity may also be based on past experience with certain behaviors, ways of interacting, socioeconomic background, etc. This study did not attempt to locate and identify the role of similarity in teacher or parent attributions. It is important to note that similarity factors may influence attributions, however.

In summary, there is evidence that predictable biases occur within the relationship of supervisor and subordinate. The relationship of the observer to the actor (or the supervisor to the subordinate)

influences attributions. Psychological closeness has been found to mediate attributions.

A supervisor who feels psychologically closer to a subordinate will tend to make attributions more like the subordinate's. In this study, a parent who feels psychologically closer to a school-referred child will likely make more situational attributions than a "typical" supervisor. Green and Mitchell propose that the more a supervisor feels psychologically close to a subordinate (e.g., empathic), the more the supervisor will tend to make attributions that benefit the subordinate. One could reasonably imagine a parent feeling similar, empathic and warm towards their child. For this reason, the influence of this bias seems likely. Perceptions of psychological closeness or distance are important to our consideration of varying perspectives on the school-referred child.

We have reviewed in detail the variables and biases that appear to take place as the supervisor attributes meaning to a subordinate's behavior. Much less is understood about what guides responses (supervisor behavior) once the supervisor has made an attribution. What happens between a causal judgment and a particular response is unclear. We do have some clues about what impacts supervisor responses to subordinate behavior, however. Green and Mitchell emphasize that we are not discussing biases here as much as leader concerns under varying degrees of uncertainty. Multiple causes, perceptions of responsibility, effects of behavior, and ease of change are four factors which impact supervisor's responses. One cannot do justice to an explanation

of these factors in relation to responses to the school-referred child, here. They will be briefly mentioned, however, in the interests of completeness.

Multiple Causality: A Brief Consideration

The supervisor in a supervisor-subordinate interaction may see multiple causes for the same event. Multiple sufficient schema and multiple necessary schema (Kelley, 1972b) were introduced in the earlier section. An attributional analysis based in one or the other appears to generate different predictions and inferences. The issue is a complex one and is particularly difficult when applied to the supervisor-subordinate interaction. Let it suffice to say that the more uncertain the supervisor is about the causes of an occurrence the less extreme the response is likely to be. Finally, when multiple causes exist responses may be based on knowledge of a prior cause rather than an immediate one. That is, what if the teacher attributes a referred-child's behavior (internally) to a lack of effort? Let us suppose that the teacher then finds out the child has had an illness. One considers whether the teacher's response will be guided by the more immediate cause (a lack of effort) or by the knowledge of a prior cause (illness). Brickman, Ryan and Wortman (1975) have researched this issue of causal chains. Our understanding of causal chains in relation to supervisor responses is appropriately left as a question to explore elsewhere.

Other Factors Which Influence Supervisor Attributions

A supervisor's perceptions of responsibility affect decisions about actions towards subordinates, as well. A teacher, for instance, may attribute a child's problem to a lack of effort (internal) but may see the child as not responsible for that behavior. One could speculate that the teacher makes an associated moral judgment about the child's home life and attributes responsibility to the parent. Characteristics of the child, aspects of the situation, and the personal needs of the perceiver are likely to influence perceptions of responsibility (Shaver, 1975).

Particular subordinate behaviors result in more or less serious outcomes. The effects of behavior influence supervisor behavior. A child's acting out behavior on one occasion may have little impact on the teacher. On a second occasion, when the child acts out during the teacher's performance evaluation by the principal, the behavior has a more serious effect. Green and Mitchell hypothesize that the more significant the effect of the member's behavior, the more extreme the supervisor's response to that behavior.

Finally, supervisors' responses to subordinates are biased by a commonly held belief. People believe that it is easier for others to change their behavior than it is to change the environment, in general. The responsibility for solving a problem shifts to the subordinate in the supervisor-subordinate interaction. Again, one is reminded that the supervisor is an observer of subordinate behavior and as such, actor-observer issues are very relevant. Jones and Nisbett's

assertions apply to our understanding of supervisor responses as well as the formation of attributions.

In conclusion, Green and Mitchell's description of the role of attributional processes in the supervisor-subordinate interaction is presented as a two step model. A particular aspect of subordinate behavior serves as a stimulus to attributional thinking. Judgments of cause shape the supervisor's behavior towards the subordinate. The sequence is much more complicated than this as we have just discussed. It is clear that supervisor behavior is affected by this attributional process. The relationship of specific supervisor behaviors to the attributional process is not as apparent.

Green and Mitchell conclude the presentation of their attributional analysis with a summary list of hypotheses about supervisor-subordinate interactions. Propositions relevant to our discussion are presented below. The list highlights Green and Mitchell's extensive analysis (Mitchell and Wood, 1980).

1. Leaders can be seen as scientists engaging in a process of hypothesis testing by gathering information and seeking causal explanations about the behavior and performance of their group members.
2. Because a leader is more likely to explain member performance with internal causes than external causes, leader behavior is more likely to be directed at the member than at situational factors.
   (a) Since a member is more likely to explain his or her own performance with external causes, this basic difference in causal explanations and the resultant leader behavior serves as a major source of leader-member conflict and miscommunication.
3. Locus of control and stability are two critical dimensions of causal attributions which mediate leaders' responses to member performance.

(a) A leader is likely to focus his or her actions on the member when performance is seen as due to internal causes (e.g., suggest training when performance is seen as due to lack of knowledge).

(b) A leader is likely to focus his or her action on situational factors when the member's performance is seen as due to external causes (e.g., changing a job procedure if it is too difficult for most employees).

(c) A leader's evaluations of a member's present performance are heavily influenced by effort (internal, unstable) attributions.

(d) A leader will be both more rewarding and more punishing of present performance which is attributed to effort.

4. Attributional processes are directly related to how much uncertainty a leader experiences in attempting to manage subordinates.

5. The relationship between leader and member is a critical moderator of the leader's attributions and subsequent behavior.

(a) The more a leader is empathetic with the member, sees the member as similar, respects and/or likes the member, the more likely the leader is to form "favorable" causal attributions for the member's performance (e.g., attributing success to internal causes and failure to external causes).

(b) The more removed the leader (e.g., the greater the power), the more likely the leader is to make "unfavorable" causal attributions about the member's performance.

6. Leader expectations about member performance interact with actual performance to determine the leader's attributions.

7. The effects of the subordinate's behavior and the degree of responsibility inferred by the leader will influence the action selected.

(a) The more extreme the effect, the more extreme the response.

(b) The greater the perceived responsibility of the member, the more likely the leader is to take action concerning the member and the more extreme the response.

The authors' concluding hypotheses direct our thinking towards a test of the model they presented. That model, again, addresses attributional behavior in supervisor's interactions with poorly performing subordinates. Green and Mitchell (1979) articulate the theoretical development of the model. Mitchell and Wood, in 1980, briefly redescribe the model. They provide an empirical test of some of its

propositions, primarily. Mitchell and Wood's article is reviewed next.
It may be helpful to keep in mind that the methodological design for
this dissertation will be directly adapted from Mitchell and Wood
(1980).

Mitchell's Model: An Empirical Test

Mitchell (1979) wrote that one of the most current topics in
today's literature on organizational behavior is the use of attribution
theory. Mitchell poses a fundamental question in the development and
testing of his model. He asks how attributions may be used to help de-
scribe how supervisors deal with poor performers. Mitchell and Wood
explore supervisors' judgments about cause and related responses to
subordinates. Specifically, they ask nursing supervisors to attribute
cause and predict their responses to poor behavior (mistakes) by their
nursing subordinates. Three factors are central to Mitchell and Wood's
investigation: (1) information cues, (2) consequences of poor perfor-
mance, and (3) the relationship of attributions to responses.

First, it is supposed that informational and situational factors
link assessments of cause to a particular witnessed behavior. That is,
the supervisor's information about distinctiveness, consistency, and
consensus predictably influences attributions internally or externally.
For example, if a subordinate has performed poorly at other tasks (low
distinctiveness), has performed poorly on this task before (high con-
sistency), and no one else seems to have trouble with this task (low
consensus), then one might expect a supervisor to attribute cause
internally. (The reverse should result in external attributions,

then.) These informational cues (Kelley, 1972a) are highly relevant to

a supervisor's judgments about why an incident has occurred.

A second important supposition relates to the effects or conse-

quences of an incident of poor performance. The difficulties that

arise from an incident may be minor or more serious. (For example, the

wrong medication given by a nurse may result in the patient's having a

headache--a minor difficulty. Or, the mistake could result in death--

clearly, a major difficulty.) It is likely that these consequences

impact on both the attribution and the responses. Mitchell and Wood

argue that the more severe the consequences, the more likely are inter-

nal attributions and punitive, personal responses to the subordinate.

A third supposition suggests that attributions are directly related

to responses. Mitchell and Wood hypothesize that internal attributions

are related to responses that focus on the subordinate and not the

situation. Further, they contend that external attributions are re-

lated to a supervisor's focus on situational factors. Thus, if the

cause is seen as internal, then the responsibility for change will be

on the subordinate. On the other hand, it seems likely that external

attributions direct the supervisor's response to a change in the task

or setting.

A final hypothesis suggests that supervisors in general will see

poor performance on the part of their subordinates as more internally

than externally caused. Over all conditions, then, an internal attri-

bution for subordinates' poor performance is more likely than an exter-

nal attribution.

The hypotheses were tested on twenty-three nursing supervisors. (The authors designed two experiments. Their first is fundamentally important and most relevant to the question addressed in this dissertation.) Each of the respondents was presented with Mitchell's attribution measure (Mitchell, 1980). The measure consists of six cases (in vignette form) which involve a nurse's poor performance on the hospital ward. Three levels of work history for the nurse in question are used (good work history, no work history, and poor work history). Consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness were manipulated to present the desired work history. Two levels of outcome severity (severe, not severe) were also manipulated. Each of the twenty-three nursing supervisors read six cases that represented all six conditions. The respondents supplied attributions and responses to questions following each case.

Three types of measures were included in the questionnaire design: manipulation checks, attributions, and responses. One manipulation check was, "How serious do you feel the actual outcome described in the incident was for the particular patient involved?" Analysis of manipulation checks were found to be successful by Mitchell and Wood.

The attribution questions provided eight possible causes for the nurse's performance. Four of these were internal and four were external. Two summary questions, in addition, asked the supervisors to consider again the role of internal and external factors in each incident of poor performance.

Mitchell and Wood found that a supervisor's information about dis-
tinctiveness, consistency, and consensus predictably influences attri-
butions. A poor work history (low distinctiveness, high consistency,
and low consensus) and a serious outcome resulted in a significantly
higher frequency of internal attributions. Conversely, a good work
history (high distinctiveness, low consistency, and high consensus) and
a nonserious outcome resulted in significantly more external attribu-
tions. Particular patterns of informational and situational cues lead
to predictable attributions. Thus, Kelley's (1972a) theoretical asser-
tions and the first link of Mitchell's model were experimentally
supported.

Four additional questions addressed the relationship between
assumed causes and responses. The authors found a poor work history
did result in more responses being directed at the nurse. Internal
attributions, then, were followed by internal responses.

Seriousness of outcome was found to be a significant factor in the
responses of the nursing supervisors, also. The more serious the out-
come the more appropriate seemed a response directed at the nurse.
This internal-external focus is commonly written about in the attribu-
tion literature. Another response dimension, positive-negative
actions, is less familiar but of interest.

Negative or punitive responses (e.g., a verbal reprimand, termina-
tion) and positive or supportive (counseling, monitoring) were consid-
ered. Both are categories of responses directed at the nurse.
Mitchell and Wood found more negative responses were chosen when the

outcome was serious and the work history was poor than when the outcome was not serious and the work history was good.

Finally the authors looked specifically at internal attributions and responses directed at subordinates. Their findings showed that the more the supervisor felt the nurse was the cause of the problem, the more appropriate it seemed to direct responses at the nurse. The prevalence of internal attributions and responses by supervisors represents a general bias. Leaders are more likely to attribute cause internally than situationally. This was found to be true of response patterns, as well. This finding has important implications for supervisor-subordinate interactions. It also parallels Jones and Nisbett's (1972) assertions. Leaders, like observers, tend to attribute behavior and respond to subordinates (actors) from an internal focus.

In summary, Mitchell's model guides our considerations of supervisor-subordinate interactions in three basic ways. Kelley's (1972a) covariation model and so the use of particular information cues structure a leader's attributions and responses. Consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness helped determine attributions in this study.

Second, the seriousness or severity of an outcome of poor performance is important in determining attributions and responses. More internal attributions and punitive responses are likely when the consequences are serious.

Third, a general internal attribution and response bias is apparent in supervisor interactions with subordinates. Mitchell and Wood

noted that internal attributions led to punitive responses. Further, those internal attributions and responses by supervisors towards subordinates represent a bias. Green and Mitchell (1979) theoretically related the bias to Jones and Nisbett's actor-observer tendencies. A relationship between the actor-observer role and the subordinate-supervisor position seems likely.

Mitchell's model, then, as presented in 1979 (Mitchell and Green) and in 1980 (Mitchell and Wood) specifies an attributional understanding of supervisor-subordinate interactions. Three assumptions are basic to Mitchell's model. First, a supervisor is expected to assess cause before attempting to change a subordinate's behavior. Second, supervisors appear to function as naive information processers. Supervisors, in a situation of uncertainty, look for information cues. Much of the time, these cues represent biases. Third, there is a predictable relationship between a supervisor's attributions and (behavioral) responses. Thus, a supervisor who sees the cause of a problem as within the subordinate will likely respond accordingly. The supervisor will attempt to change something about that person.

In 1980, Mitchell and Wood conducted an empirical test of the theoretical assertions presented earlier (Green and Mitchell, 1979). Their investigation focused on supervisor-subordinate interactions under problematic conditions. That is, Mitchell and Wood studied nursing supervisors' attributions and responses as the three central factors in their study.

Mitchell and Wood developed vignettes that reflected typical prob-
lem behaviors encountered by nursing supervisors. Two factors were
systematically varied within the content of the vignettes. The nurses'
past work history and the seriousness of the outcome of the mistake
made by the nurse were written into the incidents presented.

The authors assumed that informational factors predictably influ-
ence attributions and responses (i.e., low distinctiveness, high con-
sistency, and low consensus result in internal attributions). Mitchell
and Wood further speculated that the seriousness of the consequences of
an incident impact supervisors' attributions and responses (i.e., the
more severe the consequences, the more likely are punitive, personal
responses by the supervisor).

Nursing supervisors were asked to assess cause and anticipate
their responses to six different incidents, then. Mitchell and Wood
reported the following:

(1) Informational cues (consensus, consistency, and distinctive-
    ness) help determine attributions.

(2) Internal attributions lead to (personally) punitive responses
    by supervisors.

(3) That supervisors used more internal attributions and punitive
    responses when the consequences of the performance were seri-
    ous as compared to not serious.

Summary

This literature review began with Jones and Nisbett's (1972) theoretical assertions regarding actors' and observers' divergent perspectives on the same event. Findings on teachers' perceptions of problem students were presented next. We then explored Green and Mitchell's reformulation of discrepant views of a shared problem. Mitchell's model of supervisor-subordinate interactions focuses on causal assessments and anticipated responses of supervisors towards poorly performing subordinates. Finally, Mitchell and Wood (1980) empirically tested the model on nursing supervisors. They assessed the causes of mistakes made by their nurse subordinates. The authors related nursing supervisors' anticipated responses to their attributions, as well.

Mitchell and Wood's methodology provides a useful and appropriate vehicle for investigating teacher-parent interactions around the school-referred child. Teachers and parents are supervisors of the children they educate and nurture. As supervisors do they see the same "problem child" differently? Do their attributions and responses to a specific problem incident differ significantly? These are the central questions this study addressed.

Mitchell and Wood, as we have noted, presented nursing supervisors with typical incidents of problem behavior by nurses on wards. Each incident was constructed to combine and vary information on work history and seriousness of outcome. In this study, the school-referred child's problem behavior at school was the stimulus material for teacher and parent attributions. Each incident was patterned after

Mitchell and Wood's methodology. The school-referred child in each of four vignettes reflected variations in the seriousness of outcomes (serious or nonserious). That is, the child's problem behavior resulted in either a serious or a nonserious outcome. Mitchell and Wood found that particular information cues predict related attributions, additionally. They varied work history in their vignettes to validate this occurrence. The authors presented one of three conditions to each of their subjects: (1) a nurse with a poor work history, (2) a nurse with a good work history, (3) no information on a nurse's work history. In this study, however, the single condition of no information on the child's school history was presented to all subjects. This change was made because of our comparison of two groups of "supervisors"--parents and teachers.

Mitchell's model and design, then, facilitate our comparison of teacher and parent judgments about specific incidents of problem behavior. Hypotheses specific to considerations of this study follow.

Hypotheses Tested

Teacher and parent attributions and responses to shared problem incidents at school were compared. Teachers and parents were presented with incidents that focused on typical problem behaviors in school. The incidents involved elementary-aged students' behavioral difficulties. The problem behavior occurred either in the classroom or on the playground. Each incident was constructed such that a school referral for counseling could reasonably result. (The serious or nonserious outcome of a problem behavior was varied, as has been noted. All

problem behavior, by definition, could not result in an equally serious consequence (i.e., a school referral for counseling). Thus, no explicit statement was included in the stimulus materials presented.) The comparison of teacher and parent perceptions of specific incidents will be facilitated by Mitchell's model and research design (1980).

This study investigated differing perspectives of teachers and parents on the same school-referred child. Teachers and parents are the supervisors in this study and the school is the "workplace." The school-referred child, then, is the subordinate. Thus, we have the fundamental elements of Mitchell and Wood's study. Our focus is on a supervisor's assessment of cause and response to an incident of problem "performance" by a subordinate.

This study explored how the seriousness of consequences of a particular act influence attributions and responses. This aspect of the study is modelled after Mitchell's investigation. Additionally, two groups' attributions and responses to a shared incident were compared.

The hypotheses tested in this study were based on the prediction that teachers and parents will differ in their attributions and responses to the same problem incident. Teachers and parents are both supervisors of the school-referred child. The relationship between parent and child may influence attributional behavior in a way that is not true for other supervisors.

The hypotheses were assessed by teachers' and parents' responses to four incidents of problem behavior at school. Attributions and anticipated responses were measured by accompanying questions. The

stimulus materials (problem incidents) and response scales parallel
those designed by Mitchell and Wood (1980). Teachers' and parents'
responses were assessed with three measures: (1) manipulation checks,
(2) attributions, and (3) responses. Each of these three measures is
repeated in an identical set of questions following each of the four
incidents.

The following outline describes the hypotheses tested in this
study. Each hypothesis is written in the experimental form.

1. Teachers and parents will differ in their attributions to the
   same problem event.

2. Serious or nonserious problem outcomes will result in a
   different attributional focus (i.e., internal or external).

3. Teachers and parents will differ in their responses to the
   same problem event.

4. Serious or nonserious problem outcomes will result in differ-
   ent response behavior.

5. There will be a relationship between attributional focus and
   response focus for both teachers and parents.

6. Over all conditions, teachers and parents will assess cause
   and respond more internally than externally.

7. Teachers and parents will differ in their assessments of
   responsibility for a solution to the same problem event.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This section details the way in which this study was conducted.
It begins with the selection of a sample and continues with the proce-
dures for gathering response data.

Subjects

A total of 84 subjects participated in this study. Sixteen sub-
jects were male, sixty-five were female, and three participants did not
report their sex.

Forty-two teachers and forty-two parents of elementary school aged
children participated. Nine male and thirty-three female teachers par-
ticipated. Seven male and thirty-two female parents participated.
Three parents did not report their sex.

Teachers were voluntary participants from three Amherst, Massachu-
setts public elementary schools. Sixteen teachers participated from
one school, seventeen from a second school, and nine from a third. The
schools serve the Amherst community and are approximately equivalent.

Parents were volunteers from two of the same three Amherst, Massa-
chusetts public elementary schools. A large response by subject volun-
teers at those two schools resulted in their involvement in this study.
Twenty-four parents participated from one school while eighteen parti-
cipated from a second school.

Every effort was made to make this a stratified random sample of
both groups. All participants were residents of Western Massachusetts.

All participants in this study reported having had some college. Eight persons fell into that category, twelve reported that they had earned B.A. degrees, and twenty-five reported that they had attended graduate school.

Participating teachers had college degrees. Three reported their highest level of education as the B.A. degree. Thirty-nine teachers in the study had attended graduate school (see Appendix B).

In addition, twenty-four of the teacher participants were involved in full time classroom instruction. Sixteen of those participating were considered specialists. That is, they provided some academic or emotional support services to elementary students in their school.

Finally, seventy-five out of the initial eighty-four subjects returned their questionnaires. Thirty-seven were parents and thirty-eight were teachers. An additional five parent and four teacher volunteers were contacted to complete the sample for the study.

Procedures for Selecting Participating Subjects

Step 1 (Introduction to Study). Teachers and parents at the three schools involved received a prequestionnaire letter (see Appendix C). A simplified explanation of the research and its importance was included. It was clearly stated that should the teacher or parent volunteer to participate, s/he would soon receive a questionnaire. Assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were included. The letter ended with a further assurance that all respondents would receive $10 for their time and contribution to research as soon as the questionnaire was returned. Those teachers and parents who wished to participate

returned a signed consent slip. The subjects were randomly chosen from those volunteers. (Each subject received a summary of findings after the study was completed, as well.)

Step 2 (Second Contact). Each subject received in the mail a questionnaire with a cover letter seven days later. The cover letter reminded the subjects of the previous communication and reiterated its content. It contained more detailed information about the process used to guarantee anonymity to respondents. A third person, a secretary at the graduate school, received, opened, and directed payments to parti- cipate (see Appendix D). Attached to the cover letter was a copy of the original letter that was sent to teachers and parents. It con- tained additional information which reiterated the subject's freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Further, it included the researcher's telephone number in case any questions should occur to the participant. A stamped, self-addressed envelope was included in this mailing. It was hoped that it would enhance convenience and commit- ment.

Robin (1965) presented this procedure to secure a large percentage of returns when the mailed questionnaire is used to gather research data. Robin asserts that the frequency, timing, and kind of contacts made are critical.

Robin's procedure consists of a minimum of two and a maximum of five contacts with a subject. Each contact has a specific purpose built into the content of the letter to be sent. The first contact is designed to prepare the subject in a positive, anticipatory way for the

questionnaire which will follow. The second contact emphasizes factors of convenience, commitment, and the questionnaire itself. The focus of the next three possible contacts will be apparent as we summarize Robin's procedure further.

Timing is also important to ensuring a high rate of returns. Robin suggests that a seven day interval between researcher-subject contacts is optimal. A very high proportion of returns to a communication can be achieved in a week. There is some evidence that the longer a subject waits after receiving a letter, the less chance there will be a response. Robin states that a seven day interval between mailings promotes maximum response.

Step 3 (Third Contact). This followup letter was not sent to all subjects, as was detailed above. It was sent to subjects whose questionnaires were not returned by the end of the first week. It served as a brief reminder of the subject's potential contribution to this research project. This followup letter was designed to initiate an impression of a continuous stream of followup letters, should the subject not reply. It was written to allow respondents to "save face" after being reminded that their questionnaires were not returned on time (see Appendix E).

Step 4. Robin recommends a second followup letter be sent to subjects whose questionnaires have not been received at the end of two weeks. This mailing was to include a second questionnaire and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Ninety-two percent of the subjects had returned their questionnaires after the third contact, however. The

researcher randomly selected "new" subjects from the remaining pool of volunteers, rather than attempting a fourth contact. This decision was made because of timing and estimates of additional expense.

Step 5. A second group of randomly selected subjects was contacted. The subjects were asked if they were still willing to participate in the study. All subjects were willing. Each was mailed the cover letter, attached consent form, questionnaire, and stamped, addressed envelope.

Step 6. Those subjects who did not respond after seven days were sent the first followup letter. The deadline date for questionnaire return was adjusted. The letter was identical to the earlier communication, otherwise (see Appendix F).

Contacts, then, between the researcher and the two groups of teachers and parents were made through the mail. Robin's article guided the dispersal of the mailed questionnaires. Three aspects of Robin's procedures were particularly important. First, teachers and parents were encouraged to feel an important part of the study. Frequent, carefully planned letters communicated that message. Second, the intervals between mailings were intended to maximize response. Seven days between mailings allowed enough time for a teacher or parent to respond, but was not so long that a contact could be easily dismissed. Third, the shift in content and emphasis in the followup letters was important to the procedure. Teachers and parents were subtly reminded of the importance of their responses to this study. Attention was paid to practical aspects and convenience, as well.

A questionnaire which was not returned within three weeks of the first mailing was seen as "no response." Parent and teacher lists allowed us to randomly select additional participants, as was noted earlier. If, for example, a parent from one school did not mail back the questionnaire within three weeks, then that information was recorded and another parent was randomly selected from the same school's list. This procedure applied to both teachers and parents. Questionnaires were sent on the basis of Robin's suggestions until forty-two teachers and parents had mailed back questionnaires.

Teacher and parent respondents in this study received two additional letters from the researcher. The first arrived soon after the questionnaire was returned. That letter thanked the teacher or parent for participation in the study and included a check for ten dollars (Appendix G). A final letter was mailed to teacher and parent participants after the data from the study were gathered and analyzed. This letter summarized the findings of the study and highlighted the importance of their contribution to an understanding of teacher and parent interactions (Appendix H).

The mailed questionnaire was an appropriate way to gather data for this study. This procedure includes three positive aspects for both the researcher and respondent. The mailed questionnaire was relatively nonintrusive in the lives of the teachers and parents who received it. Contacts between a researcher and a respondent were kept at a "professional" distance. The decision to respond or not was clearly up to the

teacher or parent who received the questionnaire. Confidentiality was protected beyond what it could be in other methods of research collection.

Second, the mailed questionnaire maximizes flexibility. It assumes that teachers and parents are people whose daily lives are busy. It further assumes that if you allow a potential respondent some flexibility combined with an encouraged commitment to research, then you increase the likelihood of that teacher or parent responding.

Third, this particular mailed questionnaire procedure emphasizes a respect for teachers' and parents' time. It assumes that teachers and parents will take thirty to forty minutes of their valuable time to read and respond to the questionnaire they receive. Teachers and parents were paid ten dollars for their assistance. This was meant to increase the likelihood that questionnaires would be returned. It communicates the researcher's respect for a respondent, also. In a sense, it conveys to a teacher or parent that you know he or she is busy and you value his or her opinions. This valuing was represented in a monetary compensation for their time.

The offer of payment for the return of the mailed questionnaire and Robin's procedures encouraged response rates. The instrument that was mailed is a vignette-questionnaire assessment form. The following segment details the form's development and content.

Instrumentation

This section will be especially detailed as it clarifies the development of the instrument as follows: (1) Mitchell and Wood's instrument as the model for the assessment form; (2) similarities and differences between Mitchell's instrument and the form to be used in this study; (3) the background procedures used in developing the instrument for this study; and (4) a summary of key components of the instrument which will measure differences in teachers' and parents' attributions.

Mitchell and Wood's instrument was designed to assess attributional behavior in supervisor-subordinate interactions. Mitchell and Wood (1980) were interested in how supervisors attribute cause and respond in problem situations with subordinates. Their instrument is similar to many attribution instruments. What is being asked of a respondent is presented in a straightforward manner. The intention of the instrument becomes readily apparent when one reviews the three basic assumptions of Mitchell's earlier model (1979).

First, the model assumes that supervisors assess the cause of a subordinate's poor performance prior to attempting to change the subordinate in some way. Second, the model assumes that supervisors draw on information cues in situations of uncertainty. Third, there is a predictable relationship between a supervisor's attributions and responses.

Mitchell and Wood presented nursing supervisors with six incidents of problem behavior. Each incident involved a nurse (subordinate) who

made a mistake while working in a hospital ward. One such incident

follows (Mitchell and Wood, 1980, p. 128).

> A patient had recently returned from surgery after a prosta-
> tectomy. Nurse Connally (R.N.) had checked the patient's
> condition and found him to be doing satisfactorily. However,
> she failed to tape down a catheter as requested in a written
> order by the patient's surgeon. The untaped catheter was
> discovered by the surgeon when he came to check the patient,
> and he reported this incident to you. The patient had suf-
> fered no ill effects.

Mitchell and Wood have articulated a specific incident of poor

performance in the vignette. The nurse failed to tape down the cathe-

ter as was ordered by the surgeon. Each of the six incidents presented

by the authors focuses on a different but always central problem inci-

dent.

The last line of the vignette above provides a critical informa-

tion cue. The nursing supervisor is told that, "The patient has suf-

fered no ill effects" (Mitchell and Wood, p. 128). The authors are

including one variable they want to measure in the content of the

vignette. The consequence or seriousness of a mistake is expected to

influence attributions and responses. (This was referred to earlier

when we reviewed Mitchell's model in detail.) The nursing supervisor-

subject is told, then, that the outcome of this incident of poor per-

formance was not serious.

Mitchell and Wood present additional information cues in their

instrument. Each vignette was written with a work history on the

currently poorly performing nurse. One such work history (that was

presented with the illustrative vignette) follows.

Work History

Nurse Connally has been on the job for 3 months and this is the first time she has made an error of this type, failing to complete a physician's order. Her performance on other tasks has generally been error free. Other R.N.'s on this unit have made similar errors relating to completion of physician's orders and this type of behavior has occurred on several occasions in the last year.

This part of the vignette informs the nursing supervisor-subject that Nurse Connally has a good work history. Mitchell and Wood have drawn from Kelley (1972a) and presented a good work history characterized by high distinctiveness, low consistency, and high consensus. Third, Mitchell and Wood have manipulated information cues within the narrative of the vignette.

The six incidents of poor performance, then, were the authors' core stimulus materials. Mitchell and Wood varied the work history and seriousness of outcome factors for each vignette using a counterbalanced design. Thus, each incident was presented six different ways.

A set of identical questions followed each incident presented. The questions were designed to measure manipulations (work history and seriousness of outcome), attributions, and responses. The nursing supervisors responded to all questions on a seven-point scale. For example, one manipulation check asked, "How serious do you feel the actual outcome described in the incident was for the particular patient involved?" (Mitchell and Wood, p. 128). Responses were made on a "not at all serious" to "very serious" seven-point scale. A second manipulation check asked, "If a work history was provided, to what extent do you feel the nurse was generally a good performer?" (Mitchell and Wood,

1980, p. 128). The responses were on a seven-point "poor performer" to "good performer" scale.

Attribution questions followed the manipulation checks. They provided eight possible causes for the nurses' performance. Four of these were internal (e.g., not enough effort by the nurse), and four were external (e.g., the nurse was on a busy ward without support staff). Responses were made on a "very likely cause" to "very unlikely cause" seven-point scale. Summary questions were also used to get at attributions as primarily internal or external.

Finally, Mitchell and Wood's instrument included a set of response questions. The response questions provided ten different actions that ranged from "take no action at all" to "immediate termination." Some of the actions were directed at the nurse and some were directed at aspects of the situation. Some were positive (e.g., provide support) and some were negative (e.g., suspension from duties). Subjects indicated their responses on a seven-point "very appropriate" to "very inappropriate" scale. Summary questions regarding the appropriateness of directing a response towards the nurse or changes in the situation were included.

The three measures used in the instrument described have been validated in a number of similar studies (Mitchell, Green, Wood, 1980). The development of the model and the validation of the measure have been published in a report for the U.S. Army Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (Mitchell, Green, Wood, 1980).

The instrument has been adapted for use in this study. We will discuss that adaptation, the similarities and the differences, next.

The focus of our investigation is teachers' and parents' attributions and responses toward the school-referred child. We are interested in <u>differences</u> between teachers and parents in their causal assessments of problem incidents. The instrument developed for this study parallels Mitchell and Wood's closely. The central stimulus materials are incidents of poor performance by a school-referred child. An example of an incident written for this instrument follows. (This particular incident was written for the teacher's form of the instrument.)

<u>Incident</u>
> Imagine that Mathew is a student of yours. He is a third grader. A playground incident that involved him was reported to you. Mathew was seen fighting with another boy during recess. The other boy involved was younger and smaller than Mathew. The smaller boy fell to the ground and hit his head during the fight. He was sent home complaining of a headache and nausea, later that day. A check by his doctor showed that he had a concussion. This was believed to be a direct result of the fall he took in the fight with Mathew.

This incident suggests a particular problem at school. A child has a fight with another on the playground. That is the central problem of this vignette. The format, then, parallels Mitchell and Wood's and differs in specific problem content and in the supervisor-subordinate population addressed.

The last two lines of the vignette above provide critical information cues. The outcome of the problem behavior is <u>serious</u> rather than nonserious. The other child was hurt and required treatment. The

teacher respondent, then, has been informed that the problem behavior resulted in a serious outcome.

Mitchell and Wood's investigation of supervisor-subordinate relations included information on a nurse's work history as an independent variable. This allowed Mitchell and Wood to test Kelley's (1973) earlier assertions regarding the role information cues play in attributions. Mitchell and Wood included three levels of information on a nurse's work history in their vignettes. Poorly performing nurses were described as having either a bad work history, a good work history, or no information available on their work history. Mitchell and Wood's findings supported Kelley's previous suppositions. That is, a poor work history and a serious outcome produced internal attributions. Further, a good work history and a nonserious outcome were more likely to result in external attributions. We did not include a similar independent variable through levels of a child's behavioral history in this study.

There were three major reasons why work history was not included in the design of this study. First, the focus of this research was on two groups' (teachers and parents) perceptions of poorly performing "subordinates" (school-referred children). Our interest was in differences between teachers and parents in their causal assessments of problem incidents. Thus, the comparison of two groups was of primary concern and it functioned, methodologically, as a new independent variable.

Second, early stimulus materials that included behavioral histories confused pilot subjects. Respondents in a pilot study reported that adding information about a child's behavioral history confused their focus on the core incident and the outcome (serious or nonserious). There seemed to be too many factors to consider in one brief incident.

Third, Mitchell and Wood found that information cues about work history strongly influenced attributional activity. That is, they reported that work history (W^2=.30) was far more potent as an explanation of variance in the overall internal attribution than the seriousness of outcome (W^2=.04). The presence of good or bad behavioral histories would likely overshadow the serious/nonserious variable in this study, as well. Further, it would likely obscure between group differences, otherwise available. Thus, we chose not to include information on behavioral history in the vignettes. Both groups, then, were in "a state of information dependency" (Mitchell and Wood, 1980, p. 127). More immediate cues such as seriousness of outcome were expected to get greater attention.

In summary, four incidents were presented in vignette form. Each involved problem behavior at school. A teacher and parent form of each vignette were written. They were identical except for a difference in the references to the school-referred child as "your child" or "your student."

Further, following each vignette were a set of questions. The questions were the same following each of the four vignettes. A

teacher form and a parent form of each set of questions was written. They were identical except for their references to "you as a parent" or or "you as a teacher."

The instrument includes Mitchell and Wood's three measures: (1) manipulation checks, (2) attributions, and (3) responses. The manipulation checks ask about the seriousness of the outcome. One manipulation check asks, "How serious do you feel the actual outcome described in the incident was for the particular child involved?" Responses were made on a "not at all serious" to "very serious" seven-point scale.

Attribution questions followed the manipulation checks. They provided eight possible causes for the child's behavior. Four of these were internal (e.g., not enough effort by the child), and four were external (e.g., the child was in a situation that was poorly supervised). Responses were made on a "very likely cause" to "very unlikely cause" seven-point scale. Summary questions were also used to elicit attributions as primarily internal or external.

A question was added to all of the above questions which paralleled Mitchell and Wood's design. Teachers and parents were asked to assess how much key people (teacher or parent) contributed to the child's problem behavior as seen in the incident. This question allowed a summary comparison of teacher and parent perceptions. Responses were on a seven-point scale with choices between "not at all" and "to a great extent."

Finally, this instrument included a set of response questions, similar to those presented by Mitchell and Wood. They provided ten different actions that ranged from "take no action at all" to "immediate suspension from school." Four of the actions were directed at the school-referred child (e.g., verbally reprimand the student) and four were directed at the situation (e.g., alleviate some of the pressure . . . adjust situational difficulties and tasks). Two were neither absolutely child nor situation focused. Teachers and parents decided where to respond on a seven-point scale from "very inappropriate response" to "very appropriate response."

Two summary response questions were also included. One asked, "To what extent do you feel this incident demands that you direct your response at the student and attempt to change something about the student (school attitude, awareness of responsibility, level of effort, etc.)? Responses were made on a seven-point scale from "not at all" to "to a great extent."

A final question asked subjects to assess to what extent key figures (parent or teacher) are responsible for finding a solution to the problem. There is not a similar question in Mitchell and Wood's instrument. This question was added for two reasons. First, it asks respondents to make a choice as to who among the key figures is perceived as most responsible. It focuses a response choice, then, while serving as a summary question for each group.

Second, this question is included in response to Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn, and Kidder (1982). The authors

suggest that attempts to help another can best be understood by differentiating between past blame and future solutions. That is, Brickman et al. contend that important information can be gained when subjects address cause in two ways. Subjects should not only be asked whom they blame for an event that has taken place but also whom they see as responsible for a solution to the problem.

Attribution questions have focused typically on cause or blame, in the past. This question begins to look at where respondents attribute control in the future. Thus, we are responding, as well, to the research directions of Janoff-Bulman et al. (1982).

It may be important to mention the earliest stages of the development of this instrument, before we consider this segment. The first stage of the research involved interviews designed to gather critical incidents of problem behavior by children in the schools. The second stage involved teachers and parents reading, making attributions, and indicating how they would respond to the incidents. Let us begin by looking at the problem incidents used in the vignettes. We will then discuss the content of the questions that follow those incidents.

Critical incidents were gathered from interviews with five teachers and five parents. Teachers and parents were asked to list the ten most likely reasons a child might be referred for counseling outside the schools. All respondents listed the following three problems: (1) poor academic progress, (2) acting out behavior, and (3) peer related problems. Nine out of ten respondents mentioned that

aggressive behavior might result in a school referral. Additionally,
lying, stealing, and a withdrawn or uninvolved attitude were listed
repeatedly.

Usable incidents were chosen on the basis of the interviews and in
accordance with criteria suggested by Mitchell and Wood. Incidents
that became stimulus materials were selected as follows. First, inci-
dents could not be so extreme or inappropriate that an established
school policy would be called into play. Second, incidents were chosen
that seemed to have a high frequency of occurrence. The incidents,
then, should represent problems with which teachers and parents are
familiar. Third, incidents were chosen for which both a serious or
nonserious outcome was possible since this was a variable to be manipu-
lated in the study.

Potential causes and responses were selected with two criteria in
mind. First, the attributions and responses were designed to be real-
istic. That is, they are intended to be typical and likely occurrences
that take place when a child is designated as a problem at school.
Second, attributions and responses are parallel to those presented on
Mitchell and Wood's scale. They represent internal and external
assessments of cause and response, equally.

Finally, the incidents and questionnaire have been piloted. Ini-
tially, four incidents and an accompanying questionnaire were given to
two teachers and two parents. The pilot served three functions.
First, it guided decisions about vignette content. For instance, one
incident was seen as more extreme and just "did not fit" with the other

three by respondents. It was replaced by a more similar incident in response to these early suggestions.

Further, respondents felt that including a core incident, an outcome, and additional information on a behavioral history was confusing. The serious or nonserious outcome became obscured by the presence of information on past school behavior. This response led us to reconsider including the history variable in this study. As we noted earlier, the decision was made to focus on the comparison of the two groups and the outcome variable. The information on the child's school history was presented.

Second, pilot respondents made suggestions on questionnaire directions and indicated how long it took them to answer the questionnaire. One respondent (a teacher) was concerned that she answer "correctly." She expressed a concern that was heard again in the second pilot. The teacher was concerned that her assessments might reveal her ability to objectively (and fairly) assess a situation or not. Responses such as these guided the directions used in the final instrument.

It took all respondents less than thirty minutes to complete the questionnaire. However, it took more than two weeks to get back all twenty questionnaires. There were some comments about the repetitive nature of vignettes and questions. Because the final instrument would include substantially more questions, a decision was made to reduce the number of vignettes presented from six to four. This shorter version still allowed for two measures of the serious-nonserious variables, but made the questionnaire packet shorter.

Third, early and very limited indications were that parents assessed cause and responded more situationally than did teachers. The parents, in our debriefing, asked about the children's intended ages and sexes. This may have indicated situational considerations of the vignettes.

A second pilot study asked ten teachers and ten parents to respond to the stimulus materials. The same six problem incidents were presented. However, they were modified to reflect pilot suggestions. Each vignette began with a particular core incident. The outcome of the school-referred child's behavior followed (serious or nonserious) and was clearly indicated. No information on the child's school history was presented. The child was given a name, sex and grade level, as well.

Three questions were asked. The first was a manipulation check on the serious and nonserious outcome variable. That is, when an outcome was intended to be serious (or nonserious), did the respondent perceive it as such? Manipulations, overall, were successful. Serious and nonserious outcomes were seen as was intended by both groups. Outcomes, either serious or nonserious, were modified slightly as indicated by pilot responses.

A second question asked that respondents assess cause for the problem incident. Pilot subjects were asked to divide 100% between the teachers and parents. Several respondents noted that they did not like the nature of this question. Two teachers would not answer it. However, in five out of six vignettes, parents blamed themselves more than

they blamed the teacher for a problem incident. Similarly, in five out of six cases, teachers saw themselves as more responsible for causing the problem than was the parent.

The third question was designed to see what would result when teachers and parents were asked to include the child's responsibility in their causal assessment. Respondents asked themselves, who is most responsible for causing the problem by dividing 100% between the teacher, the parents, and the child. The teachers saw the child as most responsible for the problem in four of the six vignettes. Next, they saw themselves as predominantly responsible. Parents, on the other hand, saw the child as most responsible in three of six cases. They saw themselves as most responsible in the other three incidents. Preliminary findings on this question were interesting because they gave us an initial idea about how responsible teachers and parents may feel a child is in a school incident. However, findings also indicated, as we had thought, that the child should not be included as a choice in the questions. Assessments of the child's level of responsibility for a problem incident were strong enough to perhaps obscure parent and teacher differences.

The pilots of the instrument brought our attention to potential problems and raised some initial questions, then. There were very preliminary indications that parents had more situational concerns about the problem incidents than did teachers. Both teachers and parents blamed themselves most after for the same problem occurrence, as well.

Let us now conclude this section with a summary of the key components of the instrument that was used.

Teachers' and parents' judgments about incidents of problem behavior at school were measured by the instrument. A set of identical materials were presented in the teacher format to teachers and in the parent format to parents. The instrument was adapted from Mitchell and Wood's stimulus materials (1980). Our materials parallel that instrument closely.

The instrument was given to teachers and parents once. The instrument is based in three measurements: (1) manipulation checks, (2) attributions, and (3) responses. The manipulations were included in the narrative of the vignettes. The serious or nonserious nature of the outcome was manipulated. These independent variables were presented in a randomized, counterbalanced design.

Attribution and response questions assessed the extent to which causal judgments and anticipated responses were internal or external. The relationship of attributions and responses was measured, also. Finally, the instrument facilitated comparisons of teachers' and parents' perceptions of specific problem incidents. Individual questions were compared. Summary questions provided a more composite view of the two groups. The instrument included two additional questions that asked subjects to assess to what extent teachers and parents were responsible for causing the problem incident and for providing a solution.

The instrument was used, then, to assess teachers' and parents' judgments of cause and response to specific problem incidents in school. The next section addresses the statistical analysis done once the data were gathered.

Statistical Analysis

We have discussed in detail Mitchell's model of supervisor-subordinate interactions. We have reviewed the methodology Mitchell and Wood used to assess supervisors' judgments of cause and anticipated responses to problem subordinates. Further, we have delineated the parallels between the Mitchell and Wood study and the study proposed here. Now we will address the analyses of data gathered on teachers' and parents' attributions and responses. The statistical analysis follows and reflects our pervasive interest in looking in depth at anticipated differences in teachers' and parents' perspectives on a shared problem occurrence. The statistical analysis begins with comparisons of the two groups on the independent variables.

Analysis of Variance: A Comparison of Teachers and Parents as Supervisors

This study is a 2x2, split plot design with one repeated measure (serious or nonserious outcome). Two groups, teachers and parents, are compared on two levels of a problem outcome (serious or nonserious). Four incidents of problem school behavior were presented to teachers and parents. Both teachers and parents were presented with a serious and a nonserious outcome, twice.

The instrument, then, was administered to two groups. Teachers and parents were given the same four incidents and questions to which to respond. Each subject read four vignettes. They responded by assessing causality and anticipating their responses to the problem situation.

Outcome severity was varied, as was mentioned earlier. The outcomes of each problem incident were manipulated such that they were either serious or nonserious. This measure was repeated for each subject.

The order in which the four vignettes were presented to teachers and parents was randomized. Randomizing the order of incident presentation was done to control for possible within subject differences. That is, it was presumed that the same subject might rate each vignette with a similar, repeating bias.

The design was counterbalanced, as well. The manipulations accompanying each problem incident were varied six ways. Each subject read four different cases, each with a different experimental condition. The counterbalanced design resulted in six subjects per experimental condition in seven teacher and parent groups.

There were three types of measures used: a manipulation check, causal attributions, and responses. The analyses of the manipulation check were important to the validity of the stimulus materials. The manipulation check asked, "How serious do you feel the actual OUTCOME described was?" It was important that respondents perceived intended serious problem outcomes as serious. (The same was true for nonserious

outcomes, certainly.) Mean ratings for each condition and an analysis of the differences between those conditions on the basis of an F-test are reported in the results section.

Responses by subjects to causal attribution and response measures were on a Likert-type (1-7) scale. (Response closer to 7 than to 1 reflected more internal than external attributional activity; i.e., higher values on the response scale indicated a higher rating of the child as a possible cause.) Four internally focused causal questions and responses were combined to form internal composites. External composites were formed similarly. Summary questions, locating cause internally and externally, were also presented.

Three of the internally focused response items were intended to be personally punitive, rather than supportive. These items formed a composite, as well, for correlational analyses.

Teacher and parent means for each item across two serious and two nonserious outcomes of four different incidents were compared. An analysis of variance on each dependent variable was conducted for both groups and both levels of outcome severity. It was decided that computations would be conducted on collapsed data. That is, the mean of each subject's two responses for each item on a serious and nonserious outcome was used for statistical calculations. This procedure allowed for equal sample sizes on each dependent variable. (There were 43 missing values among 2,436 items.)

Differences between teacher and parent perceptions of the same problem behavior are compared on the basis of analysis of variance

assessing significance at less than the .05 level. The ANOVA includes a main effect testing the difference between serious and nonserious outcomes, and the interaction of the two variables.

Additionally, correlation coefficients were calculated on the relationship of the attribution and response measures.

The results of tests on the hypotheses are presented next. Each hypothesis is restated, tested for statistical significance, and discussed from the perspective of the literature in attribution. Let us proceed to look at the results of this study, in depth, in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter combines the results and discussion of this disserta
tion. The chapter is divided into three sections: (1) an introduction
and overview of findings; (2) the hypotheses, accompanying data and
discussion; and (3) a synthesis of findings as they relate to teacher-
parent interactions around the school-referred child.

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine whether individ-
uals within different, but interacting, systems perceive causality
differently. We are concerned with teachers' and parents' varying per-
ceptions of the same school-referred child. A child who is identified
as a problem at school may be viewed very differently at home. Discre-
pant causal judgments are likely to lead to variations in responses as
well. Conflict between teachers and parents and ineffective service
delivery to the child result when differences are not specified and ex-
pected. Teachers' and parents' behavior will be more intentional when
variations in perspectives on the same problem event are clarified.

Two key links of attribution have been noted: (1) formation of
attributions by teachers and parents; and (2) connections between
formed attributions and their anticipated responses in dealing with
actual child problems, both nonserious and serious. To provide an
overview of results of this study, four major summary tables are

presented before the detailed examination of specific hypotheses. With this overview in mind, interpretation of specific hypotheses may then be made within a systemic context.

Tables 1 and 3 present the results of all F tests for each variable. Status refers to comparisons of teachers and parents, while Sorn reflects comparisons of serious and nonserious incident outcomes. Causal attribution results and response findings are reported for Status and Sorn. Teachers and parents attribute cause and respond differently to the same school behavior problem.

Tables 2 and 4 present the means for teachers' and parents' attributions and responses. Further the means for serious and nonserious outcomes are reported here. Parents' attributions and responses were more internal than were teachers'. Thus parents judged cause to be more in the child than did teachers who focused on situational factors. As well, serious outcomes were attributed to both internal and external factors. However, punitive responses directed at the child were seen as most appropriate when an incident resulted in a serious outcome.

Internal attributions were positively related to responses focused on the child. External attributions lead to responses focused on situational aspects, in addition.

It may be seen, then, that the sum and substance of these findings support the major premise of this study. Teachers and parents, leaders of different but interacting systems, judge cause and respond differently to the same school problem behavior. Our viewing of teachers' and parents' differing perspectives is presented visually in Figure 1. It

adapts Mitchell's model (1980) to our supervisor populations and depicts the attribution and response links he identified.

In summary, we can agree that teachers and parents who are involved in the same problem occurrence at school will view the cause of the situation and respond differently to it. Both teachers and parents are influenced by an overall leader/observer bias towards "blaming" the child. However, when the two groups are compared, parents are more likely than teachers to judge cause and response internally. Teachers' attributions were situationally focused to a greater degree, consistently. The serious or nonserious consequence of problem behavior does influence assessments of cause and response. Direct and punitive action, focused on the child, is seen as most appropriate when an outcome is serious. Finally, teachers and parents look ahead to problem solutions differently. Teachers report that they are most responsible for a solution to the problem school behavior, in the future. Parents indicate that they feel most responsible for providing a solution. Thus, discrepant perceptions on a shared problem occurrence do occur. Patterns that are apparent here can help teachers and parents anticipate differences in perspectives that are likely to complicate interactions around the school-referred child.

The results and discussion will be presented in detail in the next section. The format is as follows. First, each hypothesis is restated. Then, each is followed by accompanying data. The results are discussed, next. Each discussion begins with the central concern that guided the hypothesis. Research findings are discussed with three questions in

Table 1

F-Test Contrasts - Status (Teachers-Parents)/Sorn (Serious-Nonserious)
for Attributions

	Internal Summary	Internal Composite	External Summary	External Composite
Status	5.35* <.02	.66 >.05	1.76 >.05	.02 >.05
Sorn	.42 >.05	.00 >.05	34.50* <.0001	1.70 >.05
Status x Sorn	1.06 >.05	.33 >.05	3.94 .05	.14 >.05

Table 2

Means of F-Tests - Status (Teachers-Parents)/Sorn (Serious-Nonserious)
for Attributions

	Internal Summary	Internal Composite	External Summary	External Composite
Status				
Teacher	4.89*	14.70	4.77	15.20
Parent	5.26	14.25	4.47	15.29
Sorn				
Serious	5.14	13.62	5.04*	14.96
Nonserious	5.00	13.62	4.20	15.53
Status x Sorn				
Teacher x Serious	5.07	14.60	5.05	14.83
Teacher x Nonserious	4.70	14.81	4.49	15.57
Parent x Serious	5.21	14.36	5.04	15.08
Parent x Nonserious	5.30	14.14	3.90	15.49

Table 3

F-Test Contrasts - Status (Teachers-Parents)/SORN (Serious-Nonserious) for Responses

	Internal Summary	Internal Composite	External Summary	Internal Composite	Teacher as Responsible for Solution	Parent as Responsible for Solution
Status	3.09 >.05	6.54* <.01	5.06* <.03	2.39 >.05	6.42* <.05	5.33* <.02
Sorn	5.84* <.02	2.52 >.05	29.22* <.0001	7.85* <.006	23.77* <.0001	4.14* <.04
Status x Sorn	.12 >.05	.01 >.05	.11 >.05	.24 >.05	2.33 >.05	.41 >.05

Table 4

Means of F-Tests - Status (Teachers-Parents)/Sorn (Serious-Nonserious) for Responses

	Internal Summary	Internal Composite	External Summary	Internal Composite	Teacher as Responsible for Solution	Parent as Responsible for Solution
Status						
Teacher	5.40	23.81*	5.14*	13.84	X = 5.77*	X = 5.26*
Parent	5.69	25.48	4.59	12.86	X = 5.11	X = 5.50
Sorn						
Serious	5.81*	25.21	5.35*	13.89*	X = 5.83*	15.46*
Nonserious	5.28	24.07	4.38	12.81	X = 5.05	5.05
Status x Sorn						
Teacher x Serious	5.70	24.35	4.86	14.48	6.04	5.29
Teacher x Nonserious	5.10	23.27	4.68	13.20	5.50	4.74
Parent x Serious	5.92	26.08	5.11	13.31	5.62	5.64
Parent x Nonserious	5.46	24.87	4.07	12.42	4.60	5.36

TEACHER/PARENT
PERSPECTIVES

TEACHER/PARENT
PERSPECTIVES

PROBLEM AND
OUTCOME

ANTICIPATED
FUTURE
BEHAVIOR

INFORMATION/
SITUATION
DUES

RESPONSE
(internal/external)

CAUSAL
ATTRIBUTIONS
(internal/external)

INCIDENT OF
PROBLEM
BEHAVIOR

LINK #2
(biases)

LINK #1
(biases)

Figure 1.   Adaptation of Attribution Model (Mitchell and Wood, 1980) to Comparative Perspectives
on Problem School Behavior

mind. First, what are the likely implications of the findings for sys-
tems' interactions around the school-referred child? Second, how can
the findings be understood within the pertinent body of attribution
literature? Third, what limitations need to be addressed as one
considers the findings reported?

This section presents an integrated view of the study's results
and discussion. The restatement of each hypothesis is followed by all
related analyses, findings, and a discussion.

The first results presented are those related to the manipulation
check measure. The other two measures which follow are: (1) causal
attributions and (2) responses. Each will be presented with one or
more of the seven hypotheses tested.

Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was used to see if respondents perceived
serious and nonserious problem outcomes as intended. The validity of
the stimulus materials depended on the successful manipulation of that
variable. A manipulation check at the outset was critical.

The first analysis of the manipulation check showed that the mean
ratings for the serious outcomes ($\bar{X}=6.28$, MSE=2.81) and nonserious out-
comes ($\bar{X}=3.97$, MSE=2.81) were significantly different from each other
($F(1,82)=158.43$, $p<.0001$). A further inspection of serious and nonseri-
ous means revealed significant differences between conditions on each
of the four incidents. (The results of each t-test for all leaders are
presented in Table 5. Further, the results of each t-test for teacher

Table 5

T-Tests on Serious/Nonserious Outcomes for Each Incident

	Incident - Charlie					
	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	6.78	.571	0.089	5.75	82	<.0001
nonserious	4.93	2.005	0.309			

	Incident - Jennifer					
	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	5.90	1.24	0.194	3.43	82	<.001
nonserious	4.66	1.97	0.304			

	Incident - Ellen					
	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	5.79	1.26	0.194	11.38	82	<.0001
nonserious	2.29	1.52	0.237			

	Incident - Matthew					
	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	6.66	0.686	0.106	8.71	82	<.0001
nonserious	3.95	1.899	0.293			

and parent groups viewed separately are presented in Table 6.) Thus, we can feel fairly confident that the manipulations were successful.

It was noted earlier that the analysis of the manipulation check was important to the validity of the stimulus materials presented. It was critical that the problem incidents were perceived by all respondents similarly and as they were intended. Early interviews with teachers helped identify typical behavioral incidents. Initial pilot studies of the outcomes of those incidents were important in the successful design of the experimental manipulation.

Table 6

T-Tests on Serious/Nonserious Outcomes for Each Incident by Status

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| | Incident - Charlie | | | Status - Teacher | | |
Sorn	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	6.70	0.65	0.147	3.26	39	<.002
nonserious	5.19	1.96	0.429			

| | Incident - Charlie | | | Status - Parent | | |
Sorn	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	6.857	0.478	0.104	4.75	40	<.0001
nonserious	4.666	2.057	0.449			

| | Incident - Jennifer | | | Status - Teacher | | |
Sorn	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	6.050	1.234	0.276	3.21	39	<.003
nonserious	4.714	1.419	0.309			

| | Incident - Jennifer | | | Status - Parent | | |
Sorn	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	5.76	1.26	0.275	1.91	40	<.064
nonserious	4.619	2.44	0.532			

| | Incident - Ellen | | | Status - Teacher | | |
Sorn	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	6.05	1.203	0.263	9.42	39	<.0001
nonserious	2.05	1.504	0.336			

| | Incident - Ellen | | | Status - Parent | | |
Sorn	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	5.524	1.289	0.281	6.85	40	<.0001
nonserious	2.524	1.54	0.335			

| | Incident - Matthew | | | Status - Teacher | | |
Sorn	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	6.57	0.811	0.177	6.86	40	<.0001
nonserious	3.57	1.832	0.399			

| | Incident - Matthew | | | Status - Parent | | |
Sorn	Mean	SD	SE	T	DF	Prob.
serious	6.76	0.539	0.118	5.55	40	<.0001
nonserious	4.333	1.932	0.421			

Causal Attributions

Two major hypotheses were tested for the causal attribution questions: (1) that teachers and parents would differ in their attributions to the same problem event; (2) that serious or nonserious outcomes would result in a different attributional focus (i.e., internal or external). A two-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze the above two hypotheses. This ANOVA includes a main effect testing the difference between teachers and parents, a main effect testing the difference between serious and nonserious outcomes, and the interaction of the two variables. The dependent variable of the first analysis was the subjects' overall rating of the child as the cause of the incident. (Refer to summary statement/internal-status on Tables 1 and 2.)

Results - Hypothesis #1

Teachers and parents, as hypothesized, differed significantly in their attributions to the same problem occurrence at school, $F(1,82)=5.35$, $p<.05$. The means for parents ($\bar{X}=5.26$, SD=1.18) were significantly higher than those for teachers ($\bar{X}=4.89$, SD=1.30). This indicated that parents were more likely to assess cause internally (i.e., "blame" the child) than were teachers.

The second analysis is the subjects' composite rating of the child as the cause of the incident. (Refer to composite statement/internal-status on Tables 1 and 2.) This composite index was made up of four, internally focused causal statements. (Responses were made on a Likert-type scale, as was indicated earlier. However, responses

closer to 1 than to 7, here, reflected more internally focused attributions.)

Teachers' and parents' means of these dependent variables did not differ significantly ($F(1,82)=.66$, $p>.05$). Teachers' means ($\bar{X}=14.70$, SD=2.45) were slightly higher than parents' means (14.25, SD=3.56). This indicates that parent attributions were more internally focused than teachers, but not significantly so. The means, then, for each group occurred in the appropriate direction.

The dependent variable of the third analysis is the subjects' overall rating of the <u>situation</u> as the cause of the incident. (Refer to summary statement/external-status on Tables 1 and 2.)

Teachers and parents did not differ significantly on this variable, $F(1,82)=1.76$, $p>.05$. The means for parents ($\bar{X}=4.47$, SD=1.41) were lower than those for teachers ($\bar{X}=4.77$, SD=1.17). This indicated that teacher attributions were more externally focused than parents. This trend supported the significant findings in the first ANOVA and was consistent with the direction noted in the second analysis, also.

The next analysis is the subjects' composite rating of the situation as the cause of the incident. (Refer to composite statement/external-status on Tables 1 and 2.) This composite index was made up of four, externally focused causal statements. (Responses on the Likert-type scale that were closer to 1 than to 7 were more externally focused.)

Teachers' and parents' means on this variable did not differ significantly, $F(1,82)=.02$, $p>.05$. Teachers' means ($\bar{X}=15.20$, SD=2.98)

were very slightly lower than parents' means ($\bar{X}$=15.29, SD=3.71). The
means of the groups were very close, but teachers' attributions were
slightly more externally focused. This finding, though not signifi-
cant, supports the trends reported thus far.

Teachers and parents did assess cause for the same problem behav-
ior at school, differently. The differences were significant on the
summary statement/internal variable. The trend was repeated on all
other variables, though differences were not significant.

A final analysis on hypothesis #1 assessed whether teachers and
parents tended to blame each other for a child's problem behavior.
Teacher and parent responses to this assessment were compared on the
basis of t-tests for each incident. (The results of those t-tests are
presented in Table 7 which follows.) A trend in three out of the four
vignettes is apparent. Parents were held more responsible than teach-
ers for the problem behaviors presented in those three vignettes.
Teachers "blamed" parents and parents "blamed" themselves. This was
the case over serious or nonserious conditions in 11 out of the 12 cells
analyzed. Parent blame was significantly higher than teacher blame in
6 out of the 12 cells analyzed.

The trend is reversed as one considers the vignette that focused
on Ellen, however. Teacher blame is higher and significantly so in
three out of four cells.

Table 7

T-Tests on Parent "Blame" - Teacher "Blame" for Each of Four Incidents

	Number of Observations	Mean	SE	+	Probability	Focus/ Blame
Charlie						
Teacher						
serious	21	-1.00	0.43	-2.35	<.03*	Parent
nonserious	21	-0.52	0.49	-1.07	>.05	Parent
Parent						
serious	21	0.10	0.39	0.24	>.05	Teacher
nonserious	21	-0.43	-1.09	-1.09	>.05	Parent
Jennifer						
Teacher						
serious	22	-0.95	0.42	-2.28	<.03*	
nonserious	20	-1.45	0.43	-3.40	<.003*	Parent
Parent						
serious	21	-0.29	0.41	-0.69	>.05	Parent
nonserious	21	-2.48	0.47	-5.26	<.0001*	Parent
Matthew						
Teacher						
serious	21	-0.38	0.31	-1.22	>.05	Parent
nonserious	21	-0.62	0.22	-2.77	<.01*	Parent
Parent						
serious	21	-1.00	0.39	-2.56	<.02*	Parent
nonserious	21	-0.81	0.41	-1.97	>.05	Parent
Ellen						
Teacher						
serious	20	2.60	0.53	4.90	<.0001*	Teacher
nonserious	22	0.86	0.39	2.24	<.04*	Teacher
Parent						
serious	21	1.71	0.41	4.13	<.0005*	Teacher
nonserious	21	0.05	0.38	0.12	>.05	Teacher

Discussion

The central concern of this dissertation is whether teachers and parents differ in their causal judgments of a shared problem occurrence at school.

The findings, here, indicate that the two groups do perceive the cause of the same problem differently. The differences were predictable and establish a pattern. Parents were significantly more internal in their attributional behavior than were teachers. That is, they judged cause to be more in the child than in the situational context surrounding him/her. Teachers consistently assessed cause more externally. The discussion that follows is somewhat exhaustive as the findings on this hypothesis are of particular interest, here.

The discrepant perceptions of systems' helpers viewing the school-referred child signal potential conflict. Teachers and parents who perceive the same event differently, who may in fact define the problem differently, are not likely to communicate effectively. Treatment plans are difficult to make, when problem definitions are incompatible.

Teachers, parents, and counseling professionals experience the ramifications of differing perceptions, frequently. For example, a child may be referred by the schools for counseling. The school representative defines the problem according to his/her perspective. The parent, on the other hand, may see no problem at all, or a different one, perhaps. The counselor is faced with coordinating discrepant views. (Incidentally, the counselor may have a third view of the school problem.) The school-referred child is the focus of several

well intentioned, but nonsystemic assessments. It is helpful to the
school, the family, and the community counseling agency to know that
teacher-parent perceptions of the problem will likely differ. Further,
it may be that parents will focus their causal judgments on the child,
while the teacher will attend to situational aspects, primarily.

Our analysis of teacher "blame" and a parent "blame" lead us to
consider assessments of causal responsibility. Under what conditions
are parents held responsible for children's misbehavior? The chil-
dren's decisions to behave as they did were less impacted by direct
teacher input in the three vignettes that resulted in greater parent
blame. The vignette in which Ellen was the focus resulted in greater
teacher blame. The teacher made a decision to assign responsibility to
a student. The child's lack of attention to that responsibility was
seen differently by teachers and parents, apparently. The poor deci-
sion seemed to rest more with the teacher than with the child. The
findings allow some tentative directions for our consideration, then.

The relationship between teacher and parent attributions and
interactions around the school-referred child are complex, as we have
noted repeatedly. Mitchell and Wood (1980) and Green and Mitchell
(1978) distinguished between the processes of forming attributions and
the responses that follow. Particular aspects of the attribution
literature apply most directly to attributions, as opposed to response
behavior. The theoretical suppositions that follow relate more closely
to attributions. Thus, they are presented initially but are not
intended to be exclusive to this discussion.

Teachers and parents, as perceivers, are information processors (Kelley, 1967, 1972b, 1973). The information on which causal assessments are based varies in relation to its distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus. Kelley theorized that judgments depended on how those sources of information varied together. Medway (1979) argued that internal attributions regarding problem behavior at school were the predictable result of a particular information processing pattern. He asserted that problem behavior is not particularly distinctive (in response to a specific task), is usually consistent over time, and has low consensus (that is, few people engaged in it). Thus, the very nature of a school problem predisposes attributional behavior, Medway speculated.

The structure of our stimulus materials was guided by Kelley's information processing and causal schemata models. The "core" incident presented to teachers and parents gave a limited amount of information on the problem event. It was hoped that teachers and parents would project their own judgments, informally, about probable history and cause. It may be that a lack of information on the school-referred child allowed us to view the differences that occurred.

Perceivers, whether they be teachers, parents, or problem children, are not totally rational information processors. There is error and bias in our causal assessments of others. One particularly critical bias was formulated by L. Ross (1977) and termed the fundamental attribution error. Ross reported that, from a cognitive perspective, perceivers overattribute, internally, and underestimate situational

variables. Probably it can be assumed that this bias was affecting both teachers and parent participants in this study.

An individual's attributions are further affected by one's perspective as an actor or observer in a shared event (Jones and Nisbett, 1972). The observers in our study were teachers and parents. Their attributions, as a group, are expected to be more internal than their actor (school-referred child) counterpart. Cognitive and motivational biases are theorized to account for the differences.

Teachers and parents, in this study, were a particular kind of observer. They were viewed in their roles as leaders and supervisors of problem children. Mitchell and Wood (1980) asserted that supervisors are a particular kind of observer. Supervisors' judgment and behaviors are very important when a problem exists with a subordinate (i.e., school-referred child).

Mitchell and Wood (1980) found that typical leaders attribute cause more to the person than to the situation. What, then, makes our two leader groups differ in their attributional focuses? What made parents' attributional behaviors more like "typical" supervisors than teachers' assessments?

Aspects of one's roles (teacher or parent) and one's relationship with the child of focus seem particularly important. Green and Mitchell (1979) hypothesize "that the more a leader feels psychologically close to a member (e.g., empathetic), the more the leader will tend to make attributions which would potentially benefit the member" (p. 441). Research on factors such as empathy (Regan and Totten, 1975;

Storms, 1973), similarity (Banks, 1976), and liking (Regan, Straus and Fazio, 1974) indicates that both groups' attributions would more close-ly resemble the child's self-attributions when these factors are present. How might these research findings influence teachers and parents differently?

One could argue that the parent-child relationship is psychologi-cally closer than the teacher-student relationship. Thus, one might anticipate that parent attributions would more closely resemble the child's expected self-attributions. This was not the case, in this study. Parents were more likely to place the blame with the child than with the situation.

Perhaps some clues to the discrepancy lie in Mitchell and Green's statement regarding potential benefits. It may be that teachers and parents view the child's behavior very differently in terms of expec-tancies for the future. In one sense, teachers can "afford" to focus on the situational variables as they assess cause, whereas parents cannot. Teacher training programs educate professionals to keep a considered psychological distance from a student and constantly alter situational variables that influence behaviors at school. Parents, on the other hand, may teach their children a more general set of values and rules of behavior. Over all situations, parents may feel that their child is responsible for his/her actions.

It has been said that increased psychological distance leads to attributions by the leader which are potentially harmful to the subor-dinate (Green and Mitchell, 1979). It would seem that teachers are not

psychologically closer than parents are to the school-referred child. This interpretation of the findings would be unwarranted. It seems likely that teachers' professional perspective allows them a more situational viewing of the problems at school. Parents, however, may look towards possible implications for future decisions made poorly by their child. The difference may be related to what Buss (1978) termed assessments of cause as distinct from judgments of reason. Parents' internal attributions may be a result of psychological closeness and real concern about their child's future behavior. Further, actors tend to give reasoned explanations rather than causal ones. Let us continue this discussion at the end of the chapter and for now turn to the limitations of the study.

Limitations

The stimulus materials represent a major limitation to this research. They were piloted twice but certain choices made were not the best given what we know from this larger sample.

The incidents were approximately equivalent to one another but the incident regarding Ellen was the least effective. The vignette focused more on a teacher's decision rather than on a problem child's judgment. Thus, it was different from the others. It resulted in more respondents focusing on the teacher's behavior rather than the child's behavior.

The closed questions using the Likert-scale response format limited our understanding of perceptual differences. One assumes that teachers' responses situationally included particular elements at

school (i.e., the school environment, teacher supervision and monitor-
ing, etc.). However, one is not certain how much projection about home
situations, parental responsibility, etc. played a part in their defi-
nitions of "situation." A more open-ended measure might have increased
our understanding of teacher (and parent) attributional reasoning.

Additionally, we do not know how a self-serving attributional be-
havior (Miller and Ross, 1975; Bradley, 1978) may have influenced
causal judgments. Perceivers tend to take credit for positive behav-
ioral outcomes but deny responsibility for negative ones. A question
regarding the subject's more public view of him/herself might have been
more meaningful.

Finally, the significant difference between teachers and parents
occurred in one cell only. The trend continued to be a strong one, but
significance was not proven repeatedly on this hypothesis.

We have discussed the findings regarding teacher and parent dif-
ferences, in depth. Let us now turn to the analyses regarding the
second hypothesis. Attributional differences can be specified further
by looking at the effects of serious and nonserious problem outcomes.

Results - Hypothesis #2

The second hypothesis predicted that serious or nonserious out-
comes would result in a different attributional focus (i.e., internal
or external). The dependent variable of the first analysis, here, is
the subjects' overall rating of the child as the cause of the incident.
A comparison of serious and nonserious outcomes as they are related to

internal attributions is of central interest, then. (Refer to summary statement/internal-Sorn (serious or nonserious) in Tables 1 and 2.)

The seriousness or nonseriousness of outcomes did not result in significant differences in attributional focus ($F(1,82)=42$, $p>.05$) as outcomes ($\bar{X}=5.14$, SD=1.16) differed in a minor way from nonserious outcomes ($\bar{X}=5.00$, SD=1.35).

The results of second analysis, the subjects' composite rating of the child as the cause of the incident, were similar. (Refer to composite statement/internal-Sorn in Tables 1 and 2.) Means for the serious outcome ($\bar{X}=14.48$, SD=3.17) were equal to those of the nonserious outcome ($\bar{X}=14.48$, SD=2.95, $F(1,82)=.00$, $p<1.0$). These results support earlier findings reported.

The presentation of serious or nonserious outcomes did result in significant differences of attributional focus on the external dependent variable, $F(1,82)=34.50$, $p<.0001$). (Refer to summary external statement-Sorn in Tables 1 and 2.) Serious means ($\bar{X}=5.04$, SD=1.11) were higher than nonserious means ($\bar{X}=4.20$, SD=1.34). These findings indicate that serious outcomes resulted in a significantly higher rate of external attributions than did nonserious outcomes. More serious consequences of problem behavior (rather than less serious) were attributed to external variables or aspects of the situation.

There was a significant interaction between supervisor status (teacher or parent) and serious or nonserious outcomes ($F(1,82)=1.06$, $p<.05$). Teacher and parent means for the serious problem outcomes were $\bar{X}=5.05$, SD=1.07 and $\bar{X}=5.04$, SD=1.17 respectively. Teacher and

parent means for the nonserious problem outcomes were $\bar{X}$=4.49, SD=1.21

and $\bar{X}$=3.90, SD=1.42, respectively.

The analysis in the corresponding composite (composite statement/ external-Sorn) supports that finding, as well. Serious outcomes re-sulted in higher means to the situation ($\bar{X}$=14.96, SD=3.17). Nonserious outcomes resulted in lower external attribution means ($\bar{X}$=15.53, SD=3.53). The differences though not significant ($F(1,82)$=1.70, p>.05), did occur in the appropriate direction and so supported the significant findings reported.

Discussion

The central question guiding the second hypothesis was, do serious or nonserious problem consequences result in a different attributional focus? Do serious outcomes produce more internal attributions and non-serious outcomes produce more external ones? Mitchell and Wood (1980) reported that nursing supervisors related significantly more serious outcomes to internal attributions. That is, more serious outcomes re-sulted in higher ratings for the nurse (subordinate) as a possible cause of the problem incident.

As was noted earlier, this dissertation's methodology stemmed from Mitchell's model (1980). Thus, we too looked at the influence of seri-ousness or nonseriousness outcomes indicates that they do not provide as clear an explanation of differences as were earlier reported. The means in three cells (composite/internal, summary/external, and composite/external) support findings in the same direction. Differ-ences on the summary external variables are significant, in fact.

However, means on the summary internal variable, though not signifi-
cant, are the reverse of the others. Thus, this needs to be kept in
mind as we discuss the results, further.

The data suggest that teachers and parents make attributions
partly as a function of the seriousness of the outcome of a problem.
Teachers and parents are more likely to attribute cause to situational
variables when the outcome is serious. For example, when a child
leaves the school grounds during the school day and gets badly hurt,
teachers and parents are more likely to look closely at situational
factors that were operating. However, they are not disinterested in
the more internally focused causes. Our findings indicate that there
is a likelihood that attributions may also be made, internally, when
the problem outcome is serious. (The findings there were not signifi-
cant, however.) This discrepancy may be clarified further as we
address the interaction analysis shortly.

It is interesting to note that teachers' and parents' attributions
are related to problem outcomes, at all. It seems curious that our
attributional behavior varies as a function of whether the school-
referred child is hurt or not. The child's being hurt may have been
totally out of the child's control. The child's choice to engage in
problem behavior, on the other hand, can be seen as within the child's
control.

Mitchell and Wood (1980) make the point that "supervisors would be
more efficient if they concentrated on trying to change the behavior
that caused the incident rather than focusing on the outcome" (p. 138).

This argument may have relevance to our attributional analysis of the school-referred child. It is possible that kind of thinking influenced teacher and parent respondents. Perhaps it is that logic that is reflected in the higher means for serious outcomes on the summary internal variable as well as on the summary external variable.

It may not be of strong interest to teachers and parents as supervisors of children whether outcomes are serious or nonserious, attributionally speaking. Teachers and parents may be more in agreement here, than at odds. Both groups may feel that breaking a rule is a negative behavior and the particular outcome, unless extreme, is of little consequence.

Limitations

Outcomes in the stimulus materials were intended to be very serious or not serious. The cues were clearcut. The serious nature of outcomes was limited by what would seem realistic and believable to respondents, though. The serious outcomes, then, were not really extreme. Mitchell and Wood (1980) have noted that when situations seem less clearcut, more uncertainty about attributions can be expected.

Further, nonserious outcome incidents left the vignettes "almost flat" at times. Designing incidents that were a problem worthy of referral, but not serious, was a challenge. The challenge was not always met equally.

A final word on limitations apparent in this section of results is necessary. Nowhere did this questionnaire provide for an understanding of the respondents' worldview. The closed response format quantified

assessments effectively, certainly. Some opportunities for teachers
and parents to show their ambivalence (or certainty) about the role of
outcomes in attributional thinking should be provided on a future
measure.

The role of problem outcomes in attribution consists of many more
questions than answers. Very little has been written in the area.

Results and Discussion: Interaction Effects

Let us turn our attention to relate interactional analyses, brief-
ly. Interaction effects were not of particular importance in this
study. They are reported in the interests of completeness. The one
significant interaction was reported, earlier. All others were not
significant. Let us conclude our discussion on the second hypothesis
with a brief comment on that significant interactional finding.

There was strong agreement on teachers' and parents' attributions
regarding serious outcomes and more distance in attributional responses
when outcomes were nonserious. This leads us to speculate that we have
identified an area of perceptual agreement between teachers and parents
around the school-referred child. Attributions by both teachers and
parents are more likely to be situational when the problem outcome is
serious. This finding will be specified further as we continue. Next,
we will focus on the response section of the measure and so, to the re-
sults of the third hypothesis.

Responses

Three additional hypotheses were tested for the response ques-
tions: (3) that teachers and parents would differ in their responses
to the same problem event; (4) that serious or nonserious problem out-
comes would result in different response behavior; (5) that there would
be a relationship between attributional focus and response focus for
both teachers and parents. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze
hypotheses 3 and 4, above. This ANOVA includes a main effect testing
the difference between teachers and parents, a main effect testing the
difference between serious and nonserious outcomes, and the interaction
of the two variables.

Results - Hypothesis #3

The dependent variable of the first analysis regarding hypothesis
#3 was the subjects' overall rating of responses directed at the child
who was involved in the problem incident. (Refer to responses, summary
statement/internal-status on Tables 3 and 4.) Teachers' and parents'
response ratings on this variable did not differ significantly
$(F(1,82)=3.09, p>.05)$. Parents anticipated their responses would be
more internally focused ($\bar{X}=5.69$, SD=1.27) than did teachers ($\bar{X}=5.40$,
SD=1.29), however. That trend was reinforced on the associated
composite measure.

Teachers' and parents' responses were significantly different on
the composite rating of responses directed at the child (F=6.54,
p<.01). (Refer to responses, composite statement/internal-status on
Tables 3 and 4.) Parents' means ($\bar{X}=25.48$, SD=4.57) on the

appropriateness of internal responses were higher than teachers' means ($\bar{X}$=23.81, SD=4.35). Parents reported that their responses would be more focused on the child than would teachers, then.

Next, teachers' and parents' perceptions were compared on the summary statement regarding external responses. The statement read, "To what extent do you feel this incident demands that you direct your response at changing the situation in which the child must function (more support from teachers and peers, a change in learning conditions, supervisory personnel, etc.)?" On the Likert-type scale, 1 referred to "not at all" and 7 referred to "to a great extent." Teachers' and parents' assessments of their responses differed significantly, $F(1,82)$=5.06, p<.05. Teachers' means ($\bar{X}$=5.14, SD=1.46) were higher than parents' means ($\bar{X}$=4.59, SD=1.47). Teachers reported, then, that they imagined their responses would be more externally/situationally focused than parents anticipated their responses would be. Thus, continued statistical evidence supports earlier reported findings.

Means on the corresponding composite statements occurred in the appropriate direction. Teachers' means ($\bar{X}$=13.84, SD=3.25) were higher than parents' means ($\bar{X}$=12.86, SD=3.57) as was reported on the previous analysis of the summary statement. The differences were not statistically significant, however.

The last analysis on this hypothesis was conducted on a composite formed from three of the six internally focused response statements. (Refer to composite/internal and punitive-status on Tables 3 and 4.) The three response statements summed were punitive and negative,

intentionally. For example, respondents were asked to assess how appropriate it was to immediately suspend the child from school. (The other three internally focused statements were supportive and positive.) No significant difference between teachers' and parents' responses were found on this composite ($F(1,82)=1.56$, $p>.05$).

A discussion of the findings on teachers' and parents' response difference follows.

Discussion

The central concern in this section was whether teachers' and parents' responses to the problem child differed. The first set of findings informed us that <u>attributions</u> to the same event differed among teacher and parent groups. Parents attributed more internally than did teachers. These analyses speak to the attribution-response link presented in Mitchell's model (Green and Mitchell, 1978 and Mitchell and Wood, 1980). Parents' <u>response</u> behavior is likely to be more internally focused than teachers'. That is, parents' responses will focus on the child, likely. Teachers' responses, on the other hand, will target situational characteristics. Thus, the trend that was apparent as we looked at causal attributions is evident, as well, when we discuss response behavior.

The major implications for those who interact around the school-referred child regard the potential for miscommunication. Conflict and actions that may result in little or no assistance to the school-referred child are understandable.

These findings give systems' helpers (supervisors of children) the opportunity to predict teacher-parent behavior. It seems if we can anticipate that teachers' and parents' responses to the child are likely to be different, and we can specify the direction of those discrepancies, then the problem may be more manageable. Minimally, it is bounded by some researched parameters.

This set of findings refers to the perceiver as s/he acts on attributional inferences that are made. Mitchell's model described this relationship between the presumed cause (attribution) and the response behavior as the second link in the attributional chain.

The presence of multiple causes seems to influence both attributions and responses (Green and Mitchell, 1979; Kelley, 1972b; Brickman, Ryan, and Wortman, 1975). Causal attributions and responses may be partially the result of a perceiver's assessing the likelihood of competing causes. Kelley addresses concomitant causes, while Brickman et al. hypothesize the influence of causal chains. Multiple causation will lead to greater uncertainty and less extreme action on the supervisor's part. Thus, a teacher who has a lot of information about a particular problem child may attribute and respond with less certainty. It may be that in our comparative assessment of teachers' and parents' perceptions, we accessed this issue of multiple causation. It seems plausible that teachers and parents might retrieve a very different set of experiences because of their role and relationship to the school-referred child.

Supervisors' responses to problem situations appear to be influenced by the supervisors' perceptions of responsibility (Green and Mitchell, 1979). It can be hypothesized that the more a child is seen as responsible for behavior, the more likely the teacher or parent is to take action towards that child and the more extreme the action will be.

Thus, teacher and parent differences may be related to assessments of responsibility for the particular problem behavior. Parents, theoretically, tend to hold their children responsible for their behavior. Parents teach that value to their children, frequently. If parents really believe that, then it would follow that their attributions and responses would be more internally focused than teachers. Do parents, in fact, see the school-referred child as more responsible for his/her behavior than do teachers? Or is it possible that parents' views of themselves and their responsibility for their child's behavior are somehow intertwined in a way that affects response behavior? These questions lead us to consider a final moderator of response behavior hypothesized in the literature.

It appears that people believe that it is easier for other people to change their behavior than it is to change the environment, generally (Green and Mitchell, 1979). Could parents be more susceptible to this bias than teachers when a problem occurs with their child at school? Is it possible that a teacher's more informed and familiar perspective on the school environment overshadows the general perceiver bias? Certainly the teacher is more in control of the environment at

school than is the parent. Perhaps this teacher as "insider," parent as "outsider" hypothesis offers additional understanding of our supervisors' differences. It will be addressed further in the conclusion of the chapter.

Leaders' responses seem to be tempered by these legitimate concerns we have highlighted from the attribution literature. We will conclude our discussion of this hypothesis with existing limitations.

Limitations

The closed-ended nature of the measuring instrument continues to limit our access to the worldviews of respondents in both groups. The response section was tightly structured and as such "forced" supervisors to respond on a predetermined scale. That was done with strong methodological reasoning, but the quantitative answers leave many other questions unanswered.

An obvious limitation of this type of measure of response behavior is its distance from an action really taking place. That is, these responses are anticipated and not actual.

The findings here are limited by their statistical significance, further. Significant differences were found in two out of the four response cells analyzed. A strong trend compatible with patterns seen in the attribution section is indicated, but significance in all cells is not proven.

Finally, the discussion of our findings is limited by a narrow body of research on attributional responses. Too often, generalizations about behavior are based on a single study. This discussion of

teacher-parent response difference is tentative. More research data is clearly warranted.

With these cautions made explicit, let us continue to look at the results of the fourth hypothesis.

Results - Hypothesis #4

The fourth hypothesis predicted that serious or nonserious problem outcomes would result in different response behavior. The dependent variable in the first analysis was the subjects' overall rating of responses directed at the child when outcomes were either serious or nonserious. (Refer to responses, summary statement/internal-Sorn on Tables 3 and 4.) There was a significant difference between response behavior when outcomes were serious or nonserious ($F(1,82)=5.84$, $p<.02$) serious problem outcomes ($\bar{X}=5.81$, SD=1.12) resulted in a higher rating of internal responses than did nonserious outcomes ($\bar{X}=5.28$, SD=1.39). Seriousness of outcome had a main effect on choice of response, then, while the interaction was not significant. The analysis of the corresponding composite statements supported those findings. Serious means ($\bar{X}=25.21$, SD=4.68) were higher than nonserious means ($\bar{X}=24.07$, SD=4.32) though not significantly so.

The analysis of the summary external statement on the serious or nonserious variable is reported next. A two way analysis of variance, with the summary question regarding the appropriateness of directing a response at the situation, was conducted. (Refer to responses, summary statement/external-Sorn on Tables 3 and 4.) A serious outcome resulted in higher ratings of a response directed at the situation, $F(1,82)=29.22$,

p<.0001. Serious means ($\bar{X}$=5.35, SD=1.26) were higher than nonserious means ($\bar{X}$=4.38, SD=1.35). The analysis of the corresponding composite statements provided support for those findings. Seriousness of outcome had a main effect on response choice (F(1,82)=7.85, p<.006) and in this case, those choices were externally (or situationally) focused. All interactions between status (teacher or parent) and serious or not serious outcomes were not significant.

The last analysis of the serious/nonserious variable was conducted on an internal composite of punitive responses. (Refer to Composite/ Internal and Punitive-Sorn.) As was noted earlier, three of the six internal response statements were intended to be punitive, rather than supportive. Serious outcomes resulted in significantly higher ratings of the suitability of punitive responses F(1,82)=11.43, p<.001). Serious means ($\bar{X}$=9.75, SD=3.31) were higher than nonserious means ($\bar{X}$=8.11, SD=2.84). This finding supports our hypothesis. More negative outcomes are chosen when the responses are serious.

Let us now consider a discussion of these findings.

Discussion

The central issue addressed by hypothesis #4 was whether serious or nonserious problem outcomes resulted in different response behavior (i.e., internal or external). The findings were interesting, and the analyses were significant, with one exception.

Serious problem outcomes resulted in a significantly higher rate of internal and external responses. Teachers and parents, then, anticipated their responses to serious outcomes to be towards the child and

the situation. So, if a child breaks a rule and leaves the playground the severity of the outcome of that behavior influences the teachers' and parents' response behavior. If the child leaves the playground and is seriously hurt, teachers and parents will focus on characteristics of the child and of the situation as well.

Further, serious problem outcomes resulted in a significantly higher rating of the suitability of punitive, internal responses. Supervisors felt that more severe problem outcomes warranted more punitive and negative responses than did less severe problem outcomes.

One could predict on the basis of these findings then, that problem behavior at school that results in a serious outcome will be most directly punished. Support and counseling were not seen as appropriate responses to problem behavior that resulted in a serious consequence. Findings regarding supervisor behavior in Mitchell and Wood's study were similar.

The attribution literature in this area is scarce. However, two factors seem to add to our understanding of the results just reported. First, the effects of behavior may affect response and not necessarily affect attributions. Suppose that a problem child shows poor decision making on two separate occasions. Perhaps the child felt sick on both occasions and the supervisor (teacher or parent) should objectively make similar attributions and respond the same way. Suppose further, on the first occasion the child's poor performance had little effect on anybody else. On the second occasion, however, others suffered because of a poor decision by the school-referred child. The same behavior was

seen, the same attribution was made likely . . . but the response by the teacher or parent will be different. Shaver (1975) and Rosen and Jerdee (1974) have found that a punitive action will be used when the effect of the behavior is more important.

A recent article published by Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich (1985) suggests that when some aspect of a behavior is seen as "bad," then individuals make attributions to all relevant sources. That finding is supported by our perceivers' attributional responses to internal and external variables. Observers, the authors note, in a supervisor-subordinate relationship, are generally prone to overestimate the impact of leader behavior. Meindl et al. have increased the complexity of that attributional behavior by extending their analyses more towards the extremes. That is, their assertions make sense in light of our perceivers' unwillingness to respond to exclusively internal or external factors. Thus, our analyses of attributional behavior are increasing in their complexity and depth of understanding.

Limitations

Limitations that are particularly important here relate to methodology and findings in attribution theory. Mitchell's model was a rather isolated first attempt at measuring outcome severity and its impact on attributional response. The efforts represented in this dissertation are certainly less skilled than Mitchell's earlier attempts. The methodological development as it relates to analyses of interactions is in its very early stages. Research methods and findings and so guidelines for the novice researcher are not readily available.

One's creative spark and understanding of the sparse literature leave dissertations such as this one with many more questions than answers.

We will now consider the results of the fifth hypothesis.

Results - Hypothesis #5

This hypothesis predicted that there would be a relationship between attributional focus and response focus for both teachers and parents. To test the hypothesis we correlated the summary attribution questions with the summary response questions. The more our supervisors (teachers and parents) felt the child was the cause of the incident, the more they considered it appropriate to direct responses at the child (r=.66, p<.01). Also, the more the supervisors felt that some aspect of the situation was responsible, the more they considered it appropriate to direct their responses at the situation (r=.37, p<.01). These results are as predicted.

The relationship between attributional focus and response focus for teacher and parent groups, separately was similar. Parents' and teachers' attributions and responses on the internal summary question were r=.64, p<.01 and r=.68, p<.01, respectively. On the external summary question, parents' attributions and responses indicated a correlation of r=.34, p<.01. For teachers, the correlation between attributions and responses was r=.39, p<.01. Thus, there was little difference between groups on the attribution-response relationship.

Discussion

Attributional response patterns, then, can be predicted from know-
ledge of causal judgments. Thus, if one can accurately assess
another's attributional focus, then the response focus can be pre-
dicted, as well. Stated another way, behaviors chosen as responses to
problem occurrences at school are related to attributions and surround-
ing circumstances.

Thus, particular predictions about another's behavior can be made
with some certainty by a helper within a larger network of helpers. On
the basis of these and other findings, predictions about responses from
attributions are warranted. Knowing, with some certainty, where one
will focus a response contributes to a clearer understanding of an-
other's perspective. For example, perhaps a particular teacher
repeatedly cites children's home situations as powerful causes of
problem behavior at school. Other helpers interacting with this
teacher can reasonably assume that responses by this teacher will be
focused on the home situation. The problem of varying perceptions of
the same school-referred child is not solved by knowing that helpers'
responses are positively related to their attributions. The increased
understanding does allow a more tangible and manageable view of the
complexities of helper interactions, though.

The findings from this study provide theoretical support for
Mitchell's model. The data indicate that teachers and parents acted in
a manner consistent with hypotheses suggested earlier (Green and
Mitchell, 1979). Similar positive correlations between response and

attributional focus were noted in Mitchell and Wood's (1980) study with nursing supervisors.

Limitations

A major limitation of this finding relates to the response choices presented within the content of the questionnaire. The responses represent behavioral intentions and not actual behavior. The correlation, then, may be overstated "because the actual costs of implementing a particular response are not evident" (Mitchell and Wood, 1980, p. 136). It is hoped that these effects were offset by the alternatives made available to subjects. Now, let us turn our attention to the analysis of a general supervisor bias.

Results - Hypothesis #6

The sixth hypothesis suggested that there would be a general bias on the part of supervisors (both teachers and parents) in using internal attributions and responses. It was stated as follows. Over all conditions, teachers and parents will assess cause and anticipate response more internally than externally. The mean difference between the internal attribution question and external attribution question was significant (t=3.27, p<.001) and in the predicted direction. Over all conditions, the child was more likely to be seen as the cause of the incident than the situation. The results of the two summary response questions were similar. The t value was 5.46 (p<.001) and the mean difference for the parent group was 1.10, SD=.17, whereas the mean difference for the teacher group was .26, SD=.17. Thus, when the two

groups are compared, parents appear to attribute more internally than do teachers.

Discussion

Are teachers' and parents' attributions and responses influenced by a generalized, supervisor bias? Are there systematic and predictable influences that result in supervisors focusing more on the child than on components of the context in which that child functions? These are the questions that guide our discussion of the sixth hypothesis.

Teachers and parents, the supervisors in this study, were significantly more internally than externally focused in their causal assessments and responses to the same school problem. Over all conditions, there was a tendency for teachers and parents alike, to make internal judgments and responses regarding the school-referred child. Assessments focused on the personality traits of the child were preferred over situational considerations, at least in this overall viewing.

One must consider the major sources of bias addressed by Ross (1977) and Jones and Nisbett (1972) as one thinks about the occurrence of a supervisor bias. The fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) and the actor-observer bias (Jones and Nisbett, 1972) have been found to be pervasive sources of perceiver bias. Perceivers, in general, Ross asserted, overestimate internal characteristics and underestimate situational ones. Thus, it can be expected that the fundamental attribution error affects perceivers, generally and not supervisors, specifically.

Supervisors, in this dissertation, were observers, as well. Jones and Nisbett have hypothesized that observers, in an actor-observer interaction, will assess cause internally while an actor will explain behavior in terms of the situation. (This discrepancy has cognitive and motivational bases.)

We could expect that our findings would reflect the occurrence of these pervasive perceiver and observer biases. It is probably more interesting to consider how the teacher-supervisor group counteracted this strong bias in their attributions and responses.

We continue with our discussion of differences between teacher and parent supervisor groups after a brief comment or a statistical limitation.

Limitations

The mean difference computation is not a particularly precise calculation. It gave us an indication of overall difference, which is what was intended. The rate of internal attribution was greater for both teachers and parents. However, Mitchell used this calculation on one group of supervisors. It is probably not as meaningful when one combines two separate supervisor groups.

Also, some respondents in this study occupied dual roles. Some teacher subjects were parents and some parent subjects were teachers. We cannot assess how much being a teacher and a parent might have influenced attributional behaviors. We will now look at findings which focus on teachers' and parents' assessments of responsibility for solutions, next.

Results – Hypothesis #7

The seventh and final hypothesis tested was that teachers and parents would differ on their assessments of responsibility for a solution to the same problem incident. The dependent variable on the initial two-way ANOVA was the subjects' rating of the <u>teacher</u> as responsible for a solution to the school problem. There was a significant difference between teachers' and parents' assessments ($F(1,82)=6.42$, $p<.01$). (Refer to Teacher Solution-Status on Tables 3 and 4.) Teachers' means ($\bar{X}=5.77$, SD=1.40) were higher than parents' means ($\bar{X}=5.11$, SD=1.50). Teachers saw themselves as more responsible for a problem solution than did the parent group.

This hypothesis suggested that subjects would differ on their ratings of the <u>parent</u> as responsible for a solution to the problem at school, as well. The results were as predicted. Teachers and parents differed significantly ($F(1,82)=5.33$, $p<.02$). Parents' means ($\bar{X}=5.50$, SD=1.22) were higher than teachers' means ($\bar{X}=5.26$, SD=1.38). Parents, then, saw themselves as more responsible for a solution to the problem than did teachers assess them to be.

Additionally, a main effect for seriousness of problem outcome was evident for assessments of responsibility to the teacher ($F(1,82)=23.77$, $p<.0001$) and to the parent ($F(1,82)=4.14$, $p<.04$). The <u>serious</u> means ($\bar{X}=5.83$, SD=1.25; $\bar{X}=5.46$, SD=1.91) were higher than non-serious means ($\bar{X}=5.05$, SD=1.60; $\bar{X}=5.05$, SD=1.51) in both cases. Thus, serious outcomes resulted in significantly higher ratings of responsibility for solutions to both teachers and parents.

Discussion

The focus of our interest in this final hypothesis was whether teachers and parents perceived responsibility for a problem solution differently. That is, did teachers and parents imagine themselves or another as most responsible for finding a solution to the problem of the school-referred child?

Teachers rated themselves as more responsible for a solution to the child's problem than were the parents. Parents, on the other hand, saw the responsibility as primarily theirs. They rated themselves as more responsible for a solution than were the teachers.

It has been noted throughout this study that teachers and parents attribute cause and respond differently to the same problem behavior. These findings indicate that the variations in the perceptions of the same event do not end there. Teachers and parents assess responsibility for a solution to the problem differently. Teachers report that they feel they are most responsible for finding a solution. Parents report that they feel most responsible for solving the school-referred child's problem.

One might speculate that teachers' and parents' routes to solutions would be quite different. Teachers would focus on changing aspects of the situation likely. Parents would attempt to change behavior in their child, it would seem. The combination of efforts, though discrepant, might inadvertently provide a solution. But, it is those chance solutions that systems' helpers try not to be drawn in by.

It is the predictable changes that are based on objective findings that best guide shared decisions about the school-referred child.

It was noted earlier that serious and nonserious outcomes affected assessments of responsibility for solutions. Serious outcomes resulted in higher ratings of responsibility for teachers and parents. The more serious problem outcomes lead to higher assessments of teacher and parent responsibility. Responsibility is shared whether outcomes are serious or not. However, serious outcomes are accompanied by greater feelings of responsibility than are nonserious outcomes.

In summary, teachers and parents may accept more responsibility for a problem solution than they expect of another. The teacher in the example earlier may illustrate the point further. The teacher attributed cause to the situation at home. The related response behavior predicted the teacher's actions would be focused on that set of situational factors. It can be predicted, now, that the teacher will feel responsible for a solution to the problem as it appears at school. Well intentioned efforts may lead to helping behavior that is inappropriately overinvolved. Minimally, the teacher's perspective and understanding will conflict with that of the parent.

The complexity of our viewing is increased by attributional findings on control. Discrepant response behavior by teachers and parents may be more about controlling behavior than understanding it. "People are less concerned about understanding the causes of events than about controlling behavior, both their own and other people's to maximize desired outcomes" (Brickman et al., 1982, p. 369).

Teachers and parents may have accepted responsibility for solving the school problem in order to enhance their feelings of control in the future. Janoff-Bulman's (1979) hypothesis on retrospective control suggests that beliefs about self-blame (or holding oneself responsible for solutions) are coping strategies for control in the future, partially. That is, if one takes responsibility for a problem or its solution, s/he may believe that a repetition of the problem event can be prevented.

Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn, and Kidder (1982) suggested that helping behavior could be best understood by differentiating between attributions of responsibility for a problem (who is to blame for a past event) and attributions of responsibility for a solution (who is to control future events). Brickman et al. argued that the form helping behavior takes can be determined by how attributions of responsibility for problems and solutions are made. This particular theoretical discussion will be addressed in the conclusion of this chapter.

Biases which affect a perceiver's perception of him or herself are presented in the attribution literature. Miller and Ross (1975) defined the self-esteem bias as a perceiver's tendency to attribute success to his/her dispositions and failure to external factors. Greenwald (1980) describes egocentric perceptions from a motivational model of attributional behavior. Greenwald hypothesizes that we view ourselves as more central to an event than we are. Second, he speculates that our attributions tend to serve us well. We see ourselves as

selectively responsible for desirable, not undesirable, outcomes. When an outcome is personally important, the self-serving bias plays an ever more pronounced role. Individuals, Greenwald continues, look for information that confirms old ways of seeing things. Perceivers resist that which is new.

Finally, Bradley (1978) asserts that when an individual's performance is public, self-serving attributions are more likely. Self-serving inferences are more likely when one feels s/he has options. A range of choices seems to be related to an increased responsibility for a given outcome.

An additional comment needs to be made regarding self-serving attributions that follow a failure (rather than a success). Failure produces a high level of negative affect, often. Bradley speculates that a perceiver attempts to alleviate associated feelings of anxiety, concern, depression, etc. by attributing responsibility, externally.

It appears that our orientation as supervisors in a shared event is influenced variously by assessments of responsibility and needs for positive self-images. Teachers, in their public position, may be more prone to self-presentation biases than parents. They may have felt a stronger need to project that professionally "distant" stance, in this study, as well. Parents' responses, on the other hand, may have been affected more by their private views of self-blame and responsibility.

In the final analysis, teachers and parents both assumed responsibility for solving problems. It is unclear whether that occurred primarily as a result of self-presentation motives. However, it is

important to note that Janoff-Bulman and Brickman (1982) found that
individuals who have a strong sense of self-esteem or high expectations
for success are more likely to assume responsibility for solving prob-
lems. Can we speculate then that teachers and parents are optimistic
and confident in the direction that they expect to provide to children
experiencing problems at school? We will consider future expectations
in the concluding synthesis.

Limitations

Similar limitations apply to the testing of this hypothesis as
applied to those discussed earlier. The three most apparent limita-
tions involve the measuring instrument, itself. First, we have to
hypothesize to a great degree about the particular motives that were
behind the subjects' responding as they did. The closed-ended ques-
tionnaire did not provide any opportunity for a subjective comment by
respondents in either group. Discussions of self-esteem and self-
presentation motives are especially speculative because there was no
place for a respondent to indicate what kind of concerns s/he might
have as a teacher or parent.

Second, our understanding of response behavior is limited by the
vignettes themselves. They were constructed to be highly similar in
their behavioral problem content. However, the stimulus incident rep-
resented my framing of the problem. As such, my view as a researcher
impacted the response behavior of the subjects in an integral way. My
perceptions, then, constitute a bias that influenced the measuring
instrument and so, the results.

Third, the instrument was a measure of behavioral intentions and not actual behavior. This limitation applies directly, here. Teachers and parents might have been willing to _say_ they felt more responsibility than another. In actuality it is very difficult to bridge that gap between comments about intended actions for solutions and direct involvement in those actions.

The final section in this chapter is a synthesis of the findings, discussion and limitations of this dissertation. The synthesis represents an interplay of our attributional analyses and systems' considerations. That is, the findings here are discussed in terms of teachers' and parents' comparative assessments of causality and response to the school-referred child. Those findings guide our search for predictability and patterns amidst perceptual differences. Discussions of causality and related response behavior are intended to serve as a point of reference and departure for our thinking.

Let us imagine that one is focusing variously with two lenses in the concluding section. One lens allows us to consider the broader implications of the interactions of school and parental systems. This lens maintains our viewing of the school-referred child as an integral part of the networks in place at school and home. Each system has its own set of values, goals and rules by which behavior is assessed and rewarded or punished. Sometimes it seems that the values, goals and rules of school and family systems conflict. This becomes especially critical when a child is identified as the focus of concern at school and so is at the center of a network of helpers.

A second lens, then, allows us to focus more sharply on the quantitative interactions of systems' helpers. Teachers' and parents' differing perceptions of a shared problem are specified. Our look at judgments of cause and response gives direction to the discrepancies that exist in teacher and parent perceptions of the same problem occurrence. Neither an attributional analysis nor a systems' perspective of the school-referred child is intended to be an end point, in and of themselves. Their integration may increase our awareness and the specificity with which we can discuss our differing experiences as teachers and parents viewing the school-referred child.

With these comments in mind, let us turn to the concluding synthesis section.

Synthesis

The central concern of this dissertation was whether teachers and parents, as representatives of different but interacting systems, perceived the cause of the same problem behavior differently. The patterns of those discrepant perceptions were viewed most directly from findings in attribution theory. This study empirically validated that teachers' and parents' perspectives on the same problem behavior are different. A basis for understanding and predicting miscommunication between teachers and parents has been established in this research. Teachers and parents "see" the same event differently.

Teachers, observing the problem child at school, judge cause to be in the situation. They imagine themselves to respond to situational factors surrounding the school-referred child as well. Parents, on the

other hand, focus their causal attributions more on the child, not the context within which s/he functions. Their responses are focused on aspects of the child's personality as well. Therefore, teacher-parent interactions are likely to reflect these clearly discrepant perspectives on the same, shared problem occurrence. These differences, it seems, are a powerful source of conflict and misunderstanding among those who try to help the school-referred child.

Patterns of perceptual difference were assessed on the basis of seven hypotheses that were tested. The major findings for each hypothesis are reviewed next.

(1) Teacher and parent attributions to the same problem occurrence differed significantly. Parents focused more internally than did teachers. Parents judged the problem to be more within the child than in situational factors that might influence the child. Conversely, teacher attributions were consistently more external than internal.

(2) A serious or nonserious problem outcome did result in a different attributional focus, i.e., internal or external. Serious problem consequences resulted in more attributions to situational factors than nonserious outcomes. Therefore, the environment was rated as more important than characteristics of the child when a school problem resulted in a more serious outcome.

Additionally, there was a significant interaction effect between status (i.e., teacher or parent) and serious or nonserious problem outcomes. Parents and teachers attributed cause more

externally when the problem outcome was serious. (This finding was similar in the response section of the measure, but the interaction was not significant.)

(3) Teacher and parent responses to the same problem occurrence differed significantly. Teachers' responses were focused externally, i.e., on situational variables, while parents' responses were focused internally, i.e., on the identified problem child. Aspects of the environment were of most concern in teachers' responses, while characteristics of the child were most salient for the parents.

(4) Serious outcomes resulted in responses to both internal and external factors at a significantly higher rate than did nonserious outcomes. That is, incidents of problem behavior that resulted in serious outcomes lead to responses focused on the child and the situation. Further, direct and punitive responses focused on the child were most likely when problem outcomes were serious.

(5) The focus of attributions and responses was positively related. There was a positive correlation between internal attributional focus and internal response focus. External attributions and responses correlated positively as well.

(6) Over all conditions, teachers and parents assessed cause and judged responses more internally than externally. Thus, when all conditions were considered, the child was more likely to be seen as the cause of the incident than situational external factors that were apparent.

(7) Teachers and parents differed on their assessments of responsibil-
ity for a <u>solution</u> to the same problem event. Teachers accepted
more responsibility for a problem solution than they gave parents.
Parents, on the other hand, accepted more responsibility for solv-
ing the problem than they expected of teachers. The differences
between the groups were significant.

The complex nature of teachers' and parents' interactions around
the school-referred child is apparent from the findings summarized
here. The child having a problem at school activates an interaction of
school and family systems, and in so doing, becomes the focus of a
larger system of leaders (educational and parental). Thus, the ways in
which helpers meet to provide assistance to the child need to be viewed
systemically. However, the attributional perspective is important, as
well, because it allows us to specify patterns of difference empirical-
ly. It is the implication of those patterns in teacher-parent interac-
tions that we will now discuss, briefly.

The need for change in helpers' interactions around the school-
referred child is agreed upon by teachers, parents, and counselors.
Each of these members of larger systems must interact and make deci-
sions that each hopes will prevent the reoccurrence of problem behav-
ior. However, when it is clear teachers' and parents' perceptions
differ so greatly, one has to imagine that ineffective service delivery
is more the norm than the exception. Differences in problem defini-
tions result in varying treatment decisions. A lack of coordinated
responses to the school-referred child likely results in little help to

the school-referred child and those around him/her who are affected by problem behavior.

Systems theorists argue that healthful change is more a function of interrupting dysfunctional patterns than providing "new" awareness. Systems theorists hypothesize that changes in problem behavior are a function of strategically focused systemic interventions, and not new understandings or insights gained from more traditional methods of counseling. It is the position, here, that both systemic assessments/interventions and insights are important. Change does not result exclusively from one or the other. The findings in this study have implications for both avenues toward change as well.

Teachers and parents who understand the nature of their differences in perspective can anticipate and plan for perceptual conflict. It seems important that interacting helpers can consider their reactions to the school-referred child on the basis of the patterns specified in these findings. If we know we will differ, and we can specify how that is likely to occur, then we can consider "anew" our views of the school-referred child. An awareness of bias may allow us to be more open to each other's perspectives on a shared and potentially emotionally-loaded occurrence.

Further, for example, a teacher who is aware that s/he will differ with a parent on a particular problem event can plan for that conflict, behaviorally. The teacher may punctuate a discussion with a parent planfully. An interaction can be strategically guided by a helper who

is aware of the likely biases that accompany a concerned parent's perspective on a problem child.

Thus, effective service delivery depends on the coordinated efforts of those interacting around the school-referred child. Specifying the nature of differences among those who assess cause and respond variously increases the likelihood of healthful change. Solutions are more likely when interacting helpers can anticipate perceptual differences, plan for them when they do occur, and organize service delivery with them in mind.

The implications of this study offer some directions for considerations in future research. They are presented against a backdrop of concerns addressed in psychology and education. Congruence between helpees' needs and helpers' behaviors has been a recurrent theme of Ivey (1978, 1983, 1986) and Brickman et al. (1982) and Scribner and Stevens (1975). Meaningful communication and mutually beneficial relationships are a function of establishing shared meanings. A central question as we look towards future research is, how do we construct our meanings in relation to those of another? Intentional educational, psychological, and parental communications are more likely as we identify some of the complexities of related meanings.

Three fundamental concerns focus our look towards future research. First, how can the impact of the researcher's bias on the measure (and so the results) be minimized? Second, how can the child/actor's perceptions be included in a similar but expanded research methodology?

Third, how can we more adequately assess perceivers' orientations toward problem solutions?

The methodology used in this study depended heavily on the content of the stimulus materials. The perceptual frame of the researcher was reflected in the vignettes and provided a set of responses in the questionnaire packet, as well. New methods of assessing varying perceptions of a shared event need to allow for quantifiable results while providing a less researcher-biased measure.

Mitchell and Wood's methodology had particular meaning for teacher and parent (supervisor) groups. It would seem consistent with systems theory and too, interactional studies in attribution, to consider the school-referred child's perspective on the problem presented. The child, of course, is an actor in the incident while the teacher and parent are observers. An expanded version of this methodology could offer some interesting insights into the school-referred child as a particular "actor" in this context.

Third, looking ahead to perceptions of solutions seems more useful, practically speaking, than looking back to causal judgments. Bridging that gap between how a perceiver judges the cause of a problem event and attempts to prevent its recurrence (as a solution) is critical. Thus, emphasizing control over future events and deemphasizing past causes in methodologies would provide a common ground for researchers in systems' and attribution theories. Further, it would give us a clearer idea of how it is perceivers make sense of and try to cope with problem events that occur in their lives.

The limitations inherent in this study are integrally related to the previous discussion. The considerations of future research are based in the limitations of this study, for the most part. The major limitation is the researcher's bias as it influences the measuring instrument. That is, the researcher is a part of the system operating. The vignettes and questionnaire are based on the observations of the researcher. A secondary limitation is the lack of information available on the subject's worldview. The third and fourth limitations refer to a particular methodological weakness and finally, the generalizability of these findings to other populations.

The point was made earlier that the frame of the researcher becomes a part of the vignettes and the questionnaire. There may be a great deal of similarity between the researcher's perceptual set and the subject's ways of viewing. Or, the subject's understanding of a particular set of circumstances may be very different. The researcher's bias is a part of this methodology, always. What one observes guides the formulation of the incidents and questions related to them. The researcher, the observer, influences systemically that which is observed. The way one writes the incidents determines the perceptual frame and so the results, to some extent. Further, the information gained regarding teachers' or parents' ways of seeing meaning in the world is subject to such interpretation. The forced-choice format allowed quantifiable results, but did not allow any clear understanding of the reasons one might view another as s/he reported s/he did.

A further limitation of this study is that teachers who responded to the questionnaire might have been parents as well. The same was certainly true of some parent respondents. In this study, we could not determine which role was most vivid in the minds of respondents who held a "dual role," as parents and teachers. We cannot assume that teachers and parents who occupied a "dual role" answered only (or even primarily) from their subject role as teacher and parent.

Finally, generalizability is a concern in this study. The Amherst population of teachers and parents is focused on education heavily. In a community that serves five well-respected colleges, teachers and parents represent a particular and perhaps more academic orientation. Amherst teachers are well qualified and have many resources at their service. In fact, a teacher center operates to address teachers' needs by writing grants, providing regular workshops, addressing individual teachers' requests for materials, etc. Many Amherst teachers have been through a series of workshops on systems theory also. It is possible that they have been sensitized to the systemic effects of problem school behavior. Thus, the generalizability of these findings to other populations represents a limitation of the study.

In conclusion, this study found that teacher and parent perspectives on the same school problem are different. Further, it specifies patterns of those differences. Teachers judge cause to be in the situation while parents attribute problem origins to the child. We have predicted that such difference leads to misunderstanding and conflict potentially. However, as the patterns of difference are

clarified and the discrepancies in perspective acknowledged, communica-

tions regarding the school-referred child may be more hopeful. Let us

consider as we conclude this discussion that the differences between us

can be viewed positively. Out of our differences new, expanded mean-

ings may evolve.

CHAPTER V

PUBLISHABLE ARTICLE:

THE ATTRIBUTION OF CAUSALITY BY TEACHERS AND PARENTS
TO SCHOOL PROBLEM BEHAVIOR: AN EMPIRICAL TEST
OF INTERACTING SYSTEMS

This thesis ends with the proposal of a publishable article. It summarizes the empirical study conducted here.

The present chapter is made up of the article as it will be submitted with the exception of the reference list. The article was written according to guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Abstract

This study used an attribution model to investigate perceptual differences among representatives of interacting school and family systems. Contrasted were teacher and parent attributions of causality and response to children's problem behavior at school. The results showed that: (1) parents and teachers attribute the causes of problem behavior differently; (2) those discrepancies similarly are apparent in responses, as well; (3) each group attributes responsibility for problem solutions, differently; and (4) personally punitive responses are most likely when the consequences of a child's behavior are serious as compared to not serious. The implications of the results are discussed in terms of their impact on the model and systems interactions around problem behavior at school.

Introduction

A topic of considerable interest in the literature is the relationship of problem behavior to the larger context within which it exists. Systems theorists and practitioners have addressed problem behavior by assessing interactional patterns clinically, but have not demonstrated their importance empirically. Attribution theorists in social psychology have generated empirically-based research methodologies, but have focused in a very limited way on ther interactional effects of behavior (Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates and Kidder, 1982; Imber Coppersmith, 1982; Ivey, 1986; Jones and Nisbett, 1973). Attribution theory can be used to examine systems interactions. The purpose of this paper is to describe how individuals within different, but interacting, systems perceive causality differently. More specifically, teachers' and parents' perceptions of the same problem behavior at school are investigated and their perceptual patterns of difference are assessed.

Several theorists have suggested that variations in perceptions of the same event are a function of cognitive and motivational biases. One's role as a participant or as an observer in an event appears to be a significant factor in attributional differences (Jones and Davis, 1965; Jones and Nisbett, 1973; L. Ross, 1977; Green and Mitchell, 1979). Attributions were described by Kelley (1967) as primarily internal (person-focused) or external (situationally-focused) and serve a function of information processing. More recently, these early

assertions provided the basis for an interactional attribution model (Green and Mitchell, 1979) who were interested in how attributions might help describe leaders' relationships with poorly performing subordinates.

Mitchell's model (Green and Mitchell, 1979; Mitchell and Wood, 1980) of leaders' responses to poor performance suggested two main links. First, leaders were presented with an incident of poor performance (e.g., tardiness, an on-the-job mistake), and they tried to determine the cause of the poor performance. This attribution typically involved a judgment about whether something about the subordinate was the cause (e.g., personality, ability) or whether the cause was external to the subordinate (e.g., a difficult task, lack of support). A second link in the model involved the relationship between the presumed cause (attribution) and the leader's response. This second link is especially important because most of the literature in attribution theory has focused on the causes of attributions, and has not concerned subsequent actions or responses.

Mitchell's model was adapted to our consideration of teacher and parent perceptions of the same problem event at school. Teachers and parents were asked to attribute cause either internally (to the child) or externally (to the situation). It was suspected that teachers' and parents' attributions would differ. A difference, we speculated, might be due to varying affiliations with the larger systems (school and parental) that teachers and parents represent.

Second, teachers and parents were presented with incidents that resulted in either serious or nonserious outcomes. For example, in one incident a child broke a school rule and left the playground. The misbehavior resulted in either no one noticing the departure and subsequent return (a nonserious outcome) or it resulted in an accident in which a child was seriously hurt (a serious outcome). Thus, it was of interest whether (1) teacher and parent perceptions would differ when outcomes of misbehavior were nonserious or serious and (2) whether serious outcomes would result in more punitive and child-focused attributions, over all.

We tested a third proposition from the model. It was hypothesized that attributions are directly related to responses. When an internal attribution is made, we would expect that the teacher or the parent would direct the response toward the child and attempt to change the problem behavior (e.g., provide feedback, punishment). When an external attribution is made, we would speculate that a teacher or parent would direct the response to changing the situation (e.g., provide more help, alter the learning environment).

Finally, it has been suggested that leaders, in general, will see problem behavior on the part of their subordinates as more internally than externally caused. Thus, over all conditions, an internal attribution for a child's problem behavior is more likely than an external attribution. The following study was designed to test each of these hypotheses. (See Figure 1, p. 83.)

Method

The instrumentation utilized background procedures. First, inter-
views were designed to gather critical incidents of typical problem
behavior at school. Teachers and parents were interviewed about behav-
iors that would typically result in a school referral for counseling.
Incidents were designed on the basis of those suggestions. Six inci-
dents served as a pilot with ten teachers and parents. Their sugges-
tions about possible causes and responses helped us develop realistic
scales on which teachers and parents could respond.

Four of the six incidents were used as stimulus materials follow-
ing the pilot. Incidents of problem behavior were selected rather than
a combination of behavioral and academic incidents. Incidents were
selected with the following characteristics: first, incidents that
were so extreme that a school policy might be called into play were
ruled out; second, we chose types of incidents that were likely to have
a high frequency of occurrence (e.g., typical); third, we chose inci-
dents for which both a serious and a nonserious outcome were possible
since that was a variable we wished to manipulate.

Data Collection: Participants, Materials and Manipulations

Forty-two teachers and forty-two parents from three public elemen-
tary schools in Amherst, Massachusetts participated in the study. They
were randomly selected from a large pool of volunteers. Eight-one per-
cent responded to the mailed questionnaire.

Four episodes of problem school behavior were presented. For ex-
ample, one incident dealt with breaking a school rule and leaving the

playground, while another involved persistent and disruptive classroom behavior. Each incident was one paragraph long. An example set of a problem situation is shown in Figure 2.

Incident

Imagine that Charlie is a student in your fifth grade class. Charlie talked a child into leaving the school grounds at recess recently. The other child is a known "follower." Both boys broke a school rule when they left the supervised play area, of course. Charlie clearly instigated and encouraged the other boy's involvement, however. The boys returned to the playground safely before the recess ended. No one noticed that they had left the area.

Incident

Imagine that Charlie is a student in your fifth grade class. Charlie talked a child into leaving the school grounds at recess recently. The other child is a known "follower." Both boys broke a school rule when they left the supervised play area, of course. Charlie clearly instigated and encouraged the other boy's involvement, however. The child who left the playground with Charlie was hurt, as a result. He fell from the fence that encloses the play area. A serious head wound required X-rays, stitches, and followup medical attention.

Figure 2. An Incident of School Misbehavior with a Nonserious and Serious Outcome

Each incident was presented to two groups, teachers and parents. Two levels of outcome severity (serious or nonserious) were used. No behavioral history of the child in question was presented. (It was intended that attributions and responses would be made from a limited information base. Providing good or poor behavioral histories (i.e., specific information cues) may have masked differences otherwise apparent between teacher/parent groups and serious/nonserious outcomes.) These conditions produced a 2x2 design with each case representing one cell. The presentation order of the incidents was randomized while the serious and nonserious outcomes were counterbalanced to address possible carryover effects in this repeated measures design.

Measures

There were three types of measures: manipulation checks, attributions, and responses. A manipulation check asked, "How serious do you feel the actual outcome described in the incident was for the particular child involved?" Responses were made on a "not at all serious" to a "very serious" seven-point scale.

The attribution questions provided eight possible causes for the child's problem behavior. Four of these were internal (e.g., the child wasn't trying hard enough), and four were external (e.g., the child was not properly supervised or supported). The teachers and parents responded to each attribution on a "very likely cause" to a "very unlikely cause" seven-point scale. The four internal items were summed to form an internal composite and the four external items formed an external composite. Two summary questions asked teachers and parents

to assess behavior internally and externally. For instance, one question asked, "In general, how important do you feel the child's personal characteristics (such as ability, attitudes, mood) were as possible causes of the child behaving as s/he did?

The response questions provided ten different actions ranging from "take no action at all" to "immediate suspension." Some of these actions were directed at the child such as a verbal reprimand. Some were directed at the situation such as provide more support services. Some were positive (e.g., provide counseling) and some were negative (e.g., suspension). Teachers and parents indicated their response on a seven-point "very appropriate" to "very inappropriate" scale. Again, summary questions were asked to assess internal and external focus of attention. For example, one question asked, "To what extent would you want to change something about the situation?" Seven-point scales ranging from "not at all" to "to a great extent" were used.

Results

Manipulation Check

An analysis of the manipulation check showed that the mean rating for the serious outcomes ($\bar{X}$=6.28, MSE=2.81) was significantly higher ($F(1,82)$=158.43, $p<.0001$) than for the nonserious outcomes ($\bar{X}$=3.97, MSE=2.81). We can feel fairly confident that the manipulations were successful.

Causal Attributions

Two hypotheses were tested for the causal attribution questions: (1) that teachers and parents would differ in their attributions to the same problem event; (2) that serious or nonserious outcomes would result in different attributional focus (i.e., internal or external).

A 2x2 analysis of variance was conducted, with the dependent variable being the subjects' overall rating of the child as a cause of the incident (the summary question). The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. Teachers and parents differed significantly in their attributions to the same problem occurrence. Parents rated the child higher as a possible cause of the incident being evaluated, $F(1,82)=5.35$, $p<.05$. Parents, then, were more likely to focus causal judgments on the child than were teachers. Differences on the composite variables, though in the same direction, were not significant. In addition, more serious problem outcomes resulted in a higher rating of the situation as a possible cause of the incident of problem behavior, $F(1,82)=34.50$, $p<.0001$. More serious consequences, then, were attributed to external variables or aspects of the situation by both groups. Summated scores occurred in the appropriate direction and were not significant. There was a significant interaction between one's being a teacher or parent and serious or nonserious outcomes ($F(1,82)=1.06$, $p<.05$). Being a parent resulted in more internally focused attributions than being a teacher. Further, serious outcomes produced higher rates of externally focused causal judgments, i.e., attributions to situational factors. (See Tables 1 and 2, pages 79 and 80.)

Responses to Problem Behavior

It was hypothesized that (3) teachers and parents would differ in their responses to the same problem event and (4) that seriousness of the outcome would influence the response behavior.

A 2x2 analysis of variance, with the composite question regarding the appropriateness of directing a response at the child, provided support for the third hypothesis. These results are shown in Tables 3 and 4, pages 81 and 82. Being a parent subject resulted in higher ratings of a response directed at the child, $F(1,82)=6.54$, $p<.01$. Teacher/ parent response differences were also indicated when a 2x2 analysis of variance was run on the summary question regarding the suitability of directing a response at the situation, as the dependent variable. Being a teacher resulted in higher ratings of a response directed at the situation or environment $(F(1,82)=5.06$, $p<.03)$.

The seriousness of an outcome had a main effect on internal and external variables measured also. Serious outcomes, as compared to nonserious outcomes, resulted in significantly higher ratings for the appropriateness of responses towards both the child and the situation. (Summated scores on the external composite were significant and supported these findings, as well.)

Thus, teacher and parent responses to the same problem event differed. Teachers anticipated their responses would be more externally focused than would be parents'. Again, parents imagined themselves responding more to the child than to aspects of the situation and

serious outcomes resulted in responses directed at both the child and the situation.

This hypothesis was further tested by doing a more detailed analysis of the specific response questions. Six of the ten responses were directed at the child (suspension, monitor future behavior, written reprimand, verbal reprimand, counseling, and instructional help). Three responses were directed at the situation (adjust difficulty, additional staff support, additional moral support) and one item said "take no action." Three of the six personal responses were punitive rather than supportive and were summed to form a composite. That composite was used as a dependent variable in a 2x2 analysis of variance.

The more serious the outcome the more suitable was a punitive response directed at the child ($F(1,82)=11.43$, $p<.001$). Therefore more negative responses are chosen when the outcomes are serious. There was no significant difference between teacher and parent responses on this variable.

Attributions and Responses

A fifth hypothesis suggested that internal attributions would be related to responses directed at the child. To test the hypothesis we correlated the summary attribution questions with the summary response questions. The more the teacher or parent felt that the child was the cause of the incident, the more it was considered appropriate to direct a response at the child ($r=.66$, $p<.01$). Also, the more the teacher or parent felt that some aspect of the situation was responsible, the more

it was considered appropriate to direct their responses at the situation (r=.37, p<.01). These results are as predicted.

The sixth hypothesis suggested that there would be a general bias on the part of leaders or supervisors toward using internal attributions and internal responses. To test this hypothesis, we again used the summary questions. The mean difference between the internal attribution question and external attribution question was significant (t=3.27, p<.001) and in the predicted direction. Over all conditions, the child was more likely to be seen as the cause of the incident than the situation. The results of the two summary response questions were similar. The t value was 5.46, p<.001. The mean difference for the parent group was 1.10, SD=.17, whereas the mean difference for the teacher group was .26, SD=.17. Thus, when the two groups are compared, parents appear to attribute more internally than do teachers.

A final hypothesis tested was that teachers and parents would differ on their assessments of responsibility for a solution to the same problem incident. The dependent variable on the first 2x2 analysis of variance was the respondents' rating of the teacher as responsible for a solution to the school problem. There was a significant difference between teacher and parent assessments (F(1,82)=6.42, p<.01). Teachers saw themselves as more responsible for a problem solution than did the parent group.

The dependent variable on a second two way analysis of variance was the subjects' rating of the parent as responsible for a solution to the school problem. There was a significant difference between

teachers and parents (F(1,82)=5.33, p<.02). Parents saw themselves as more responsible for a solution than did teachers assess them to be.

Finally, a main effect for seriousness of problem outcome was evident for assessments of responsibility to the teacher (F(1,82)=23.77, p<.0001) and to the parent (F(1,82)=4.14, p<.04). Thus, serious outcomes resulted in significantly higher ratings of responsibility for solutions to both teachers and parents.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether individuals within distinct but interacting systems perceive causality differently. The experimental data indicate that teachers and parents, representatives of different but interdependent systems, judge cause and respond differently to the same school behavior problem. Patterns of difference were specified and for the most part were consistent with hypotheses suggested by the attribution model presented by Green and Mitchell (1979) and Mitchell and Wood (1980). Discrepant causal judgments and responses by those trying to help a child in difficulty at school signal potential conflict and undermine effective therapeutic service delivery. Teacher and parent behavior will be more intentional and coordinated when variations in perspectives on the same problem occurrence are clarified.

A summary of the findings is as follows. First, teachers and parents do perceive the cause of the same problem differently. Parents judged cause to be more in the child than in the surrounding situational context. Teachers consistently assessed cause more externally.

Teacher-parent discrepancies in viewing may reflect varying assessments of potential benefit to the child. Teachers may be more focused on cause and shorter term solutions. Thus, a focus on situational variables makes sense in their thinking about behavior change. Parents, on the other hand, may be more concerned with their child's behavior as it represents future expectancies. Parents, it can be argued, have a greater long term stake in their child's patterns of behavior. Their attributional focus, then, is very different than that of their teacher counterparts. Potential benefits for both teachers and parents are approached by their respective external and internal attributional perspectives.

Second, serious problem outcomes resulted in external attributions. Both teachers and parents attributed cause to situational variables when problem behavior resulted in serious consequences. It is curious that attributional behavior varies as a function of whether an outcome is serious or not. A serious outcome may be totally out of the child's control, whereas the initial choice to engage in problem behavior can be seen within the child's control.

Third, teachers' and parents' responses to the same problem differed. Parents focused their responses on the child and teachers responded to situational variables. Perceptions of responsibility influence responses to problem situations (Green and Mitchell, 1979). Parents and teachers have a very different relationship and commitment to the problem child. It may be that parents hold their children responsible for their behavioral choices more than teachers do. It

also may be that parents' responses are affected by what they perceive to be a challenge to their effectiveness in their role as parents.

Attributions and responses were positively related, generally. Parent and teacher attributional behavior and response behavior was correlated, specifically. Thus, we can predict response behavior from attributional behavior with some degree of certainty.

Fourth, incidents of problem behavior that resulted in serious outcomes lead to responses focused on both the child and the situation. It seems that when behavior occurs at the extreme, subjects are not willing to choose one response locus over another (Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985). Responses to both seem most appropriate. Further, direct and punitive responses focused on the child were most likely when problem outcomes were serious.

Fifth, over all conditions, teachers and parents assessed cause and responded more internally than externally. Thus, teachers and parents are more typical observers and leaders than actors or participants.

Finally, teachers and parents perceived problem solutions differently. Teachers saw themselves as more responsible than parents and parents saw themselves more responsible than teachers. Discrepant responses may be more about controlling behavior than understanding it. Holding oneself responsible for a solution may be a coping strategy for control in the future, partially (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Self-esteem and self-presentation motives may variously affect response solutions by teachers and parents.

It is important to discuss some of the limitations of the research itself before turning to a discussion of the practical implications of these findings. For example, we recognize that the stimulus materials and, too, the subjects' responses to them, may reflect the perceptual frame represented by the content of the vignettes. Also, quantifiable research is limited by its measurement of "parts" selected from a larger whole. Systems theorists will likely criticize a measure of systems interactions on the basis of a linear, attribution model. The need for quantifiable research in systems interactions would seem to outweigh that concern, however. All assessments and clinical interventions of systemic interactions represent punctuations. The use of attribution theory, here, can be seen as a specific and justifiable punctuation.

Looking ahead to perceptions of solutions seems more useful, practically speaking, than looking back to causal judgments. Bridging that gap between how a perceiver judges the <u>cause</u> of a problem event and attempts to prevent its recurrence (as a solution) is critical. Thus, emphasizing control over future events and deemphasizing past causes in methodologies would provide a common ground for researchers in systems and attribution theories.

This methodology did not take into account the perceptions of the child in the assessment of systems interactions, either an expanded version of this methodology could offer some interesting insights into the school-referred child as a "particular" participant in this context.

Finally, we recognize that responses in the context of this study represent behavioral intentions and not actual behavior. Thus, the correlation between attribution and response may be overstated because the actual costs of implementing a particular response are not evident. However, as Mitchell and Wood (1980) have noted, the responses represent alternatives available and so this might partially offset such an effect.

The data presented here provide theoretical support for the Mitchell and Wood model and have practical implications as well. First, teachers and parents, leaders and representatives of different but interacting systems, judged cause and responded differently to the same problem behavior at school. The varying attributions and responses of teachers and parents toward a single incident of problem behavior may lead to powerful points of conflict. Effective service delivery begins with shared communication among those interacting to help a child having problems at school.

Second, as well as the findings here regarding teacher and parent differences, there is considerable evidence that leaders (as observers) overattribute behavior to internal causes (Jones and Nisbett, 1972; L. Ross, 1977; Green and Mitchell, 1979; Mitchell and Wood, 1980). The less typical behavior of teachers (as observers) in this study and the differences among leaders and observers and participants speak to the complexity of meaningful interactions among systems helpers.

Second, the data suggest that teachers and parents make attributions and responses partly as a function of the seriousness of an

outcome. It seems our interventions as teachers, parents, and clinicians would be more efficient if we focused on trying to change the behavior that caused the incident rather than focusing on the outcome.

In conclusion, this study found that teacher and parent perspectives on the same school problem are different. Further, it specifies patterns of those differences. Teachers judge cause to be in the situation while parents attribute problem origins to the child. We have predicted that such difference can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. However, as the patterns of difference are clarified and the discrepancies in perspective acknowledged, communications regarding the school-referred child may be more hopeful. Let us consider as we conclude this discussion that the differences between us can be viewed positively. Out of our differences new, expanded meanings may evolve.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Years of Education by Status

Years of Education

Frequency Percent   Status
Row Percent
Column Percent

	Teacher	Parent	Total
Some college	0	8	8
	0.00	9.52	9.52
	0.00	100.00	
	0.00	19.05	
B.A.	3	9	12
	3.57	10.71	14.29
	25.00	75.00	
	7.14	21.43	
Graduate school	39	25	64
	46.43	29.76	76.19
	60.94	39.06	
	92.86	59.52	
Total	42	42	84
	50.00	50.00	100.00

APPENDIX B

School by Status

School

Frequency Percent Row Percent Column Percent	Status Teacher	Parent	Total
Fort River	16 19.05 40.00 38.10	24 28.57 60.00 57.14	40 47.62
Marks Meadow	17 20.24 48.57 40.48	18 21.43 51.43 42.86	35 41.67
Wildwood	9 10.71 100.00 21.43	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	9 10.71
Total	42 50.00	42 50.00	84 100.00

APPENDIX C

<u>Asking for Volunteers</u>

October 21, 1986

Dear Participant,

Your school has been chosen as a site for a doctoral research study.
This study will look at how teachers view problem solving for
elementary-aged children. We are looking for participants in this
study. No personal information on any student will be solicited.

Those who complete and return the tear off slip below will be mailed a
questionnaire. You will be asked to indicate how you might respond to
various school situations. It will take about 30 minutes to complete.
All responses will be kept totally anonymous and confidential. Parti-
cipants will be paid $10 as compensation for their valuable time.

Your contribution to further understanding children in school will be
much appreciated. Please return the tear off slip to the secretary in
the main office as soon as possible.

Sincere thanks,

Susan Kennedy Marx
Doctoral student, UMass

_____

Kennedy Marx Research Study

Teacher's Name _____

Address _____

APPENDIX D

Cover Letter to Participants

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. Your
responses to the accompanying questionnaire packet will contribute
to our further understanding of typical problems that occur in the
lives of many elementary aged children.

Attached you will find the original letter you received, signed, and
returned. It includes additional information.

You will be mailed your $10 payment when you send in your completed
questionnaire. Anonymity is ensured when you send your questionnaire
to the secretary for Academic Affairs at the School of Education, Jane
Sibley. She will receive all the questionnaires and send the payments.
The researchers will see anonymous responses only. A stamped and
addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience. Your return
address appears on that envelope to ensure your receipt of payment.

We ask that you return your fully completed questionnaire within a
week. We will inform you of the results of the study as soon as they
are available.

Could you please complete the demographic sheet before you proceed?
It will provide valuable information for later analyses and all infor-
mation is fully confidential.

Sincerely,

Susan Kennedy Marx

APPENDIX E

Followup Letter to Participants

Dear Participant,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in our research study.
Last week you received our mailed questionnaire. We look forward to
receiving your completed questionnaire. Your responses will contribute
greatly to our understanding of children's problems as they occur at
school.

A stamped, addressed envelope was included with the questionnaire for
your convenience. Should you need another questionnaire and/or
envelope, please contact Jane Sibley at the Office for Academic
Affairs. Her phone number is 545-0236 (123 Furcolo Hall, School of
Education). Any contact with her will ensure continued anonymity.

Sincerely,

Susan Kennedy Marx
UMass doctoral student

APPENDIX F

Followup Letter to Participants (#2)

December 1, 1986

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation in our research study. As soon as we receive your completed questionnaire, we will mail your $10 payment. Your responses to this study are very important. They will contribute greatly to our understanding of children's problems as they occur at school.

The design of this study necessitates that all questionnaires be in by Wednesday, December 10, 1986. A stamped, addressed envelope was included with the questionnaire for your convenience. Should you need another questionnaire and/or envelope, please contact Jane Sibley at the Office for Academic Affairs. Her phone is 545-0236 (123 Furcolo Hall, School of Education). Any contact directly with her will ensure continued anonymity.

Sincerely,

Susan Kennedy Marx
Doctoral Student, UMass

APPENDIX G

Letter and Payment for Participation

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your involvement in my doctoral research. I appreciate
your careful consideration and rapid return of the questionnaire
packet. The data will be analyzed and the results available in a
couple of months. I will send you a summary of the findings as soon
as they are available.

Your $10 payment is enclosed. Again, thanks for assisting us in this
research and so sharing your valuable time.

Sincerely,

Susan Kennedy Marx
Doctoral student, UMass

APPENDIX H

Summary of Findings

Dear Parents and Teachers,

Thank you for your participation in my doctoral research last winter.
The dissertation is complete and I look forward to sharing the results.

The basic premise of this study was that when a student has a problem
at school, parents and teachers alike are concerned and seek a solu-
tion. Successful solutions, it seems, depend upon both parents and
teachers supporting a plan for a change in behavior. The purpose of
this study was to see if parents and teachers were in basic agreement
about who was most responsible for a school related behavior problem.

We developed stories that depicted typical problems in order to study
this issue. One of the stories used in the questionnaire follows.

> Imagine that Mathew is a student of yours. He is a third
> grader. A playground incident that involved him was reported
> to you. Mathew was seen fighting with another boy at recess.
> The other boy involved was younger and smaller than Mathew.
> The smaller boy fell to the ground and hit his head during
> the fight. He was sent home complaining of a headache and
> nausea, later that day. A check by his doctor showed that he
> had a concussion. This was believed to be a direct result of
> the fall he took in the fight with Mathew.

Parents and teachers read four such stories and were asked to assess
responsibility for the problem. Further, each was asked to anticipate
what his or her response might be. The results were interesting.

Parents and teachers viewed the same problem differently. Parents
placed most responsibility with the child whereas teachers focused on
aspects of the problem situation most heavily. Parents' and teachers'
perspectives on the same incident were similar when the incident
resulted in a serious outcome, however.

More specifically, parents attributed problem behavior to the child,
i.e., Mathew's poor decision or aggressive manner was to blame. Teach-
ers, on the other hand, placed more responsibilty for problem behavior
on circumstances or situations that surrounded the child involved,
i.e., supervision on the playground. In sum, teachers tended to seek
solutions in changes in the school situation while parents thought
responsibility rested with the individual child.

Additionally, we wanted to see if an incident of misbehavior that resulted in a serious consequence, i.e., someone was hurt, was assessed differently than one that had a nonserious outcome. Teachers' and parents' views were most in agreement when misbehavior resulted in serious outcomes. Both groups anticipated that their actions would be direct and focused on the child at the center of the incident. The results have specific implications for how we deal with behavioral problems that occur at school.

Earlier, the point was made that positive changes in behavior depend on an initial agreement about the problem and a course of appropriate action. The findings here alert us to the potential for differences in perspective on a shared incident of misbehavior. The chance for clear communication between parents and teacher is increased when one keeps in mind the differences that seem to exist. The results imply that parents and teachers have specific areas of agreement regarding a school problem, as well. Both groups see themselves responding similarly to serious outcomes. Further, teacher-parent interactions are supported by a common desire to solve the problem. Teachers and parents feel a great deal of responsibility to contribute towards effective solutions.

The preliminary findings will be submitted for publication. The time you invested in this project made this research possible. It is hoped that your interest will contribute to further understanding of school related problems that occur for the elementary-aged child.

Please feel free to call me if you have any more questions.

Sincerely,

Susan Kennedy Marx
549-7549

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