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**THE ATTRIBUTIONAL "DOUBLE STANDARD":
ACTOR-OBSERVER DIFFERENCES IN PREDICTING THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS¹**

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It was hypothesized that subjects who took the role of interaction observers rather than actors would predict a closer relationship between attitudes and behaviors and would report greater confidence in behavioral predictions derivable from an actor's attitude statements. One hundred sixty-eight subjects assumed the role of either actor or observer in scenarios of group interactions in which a central person made a statement about a particular attitude object. As predicted, subjects in the observer role reported that specific future behaviors (e.g., loaning money, helping to study for a test) had a greater likelihood of occurrence following an attitude statement (e.g., "I like Pat") than did subjects in the actor role, and observers were more confident than actors in these predictions. In addition, the favorability of the attitude statement was directly related to the strength of predictions, and the central person's familiarity with the audience was directly related to confidence in predictions. Observers apparently view attitude statements as reliable indications of internal dispositions that serve as a potential "cause" of subsequent behaviors, while actors view attitude statements as tenuous orientations that can be modified in accord with future situational contingencies.

Jones and Nisbett (1971) proposed that actors are disposed to locate the cause of their behavior in the environment, while observers attribute the same behavior to stable traits possessed by the actor. In explanation, Jones and Nisbett hypothesized that these divergent attributions could be the result of (a) differences in access to knowledge of past behavior and internal states, since actors should be more aware of their own inconsistencies across situations and the compelling pressures of environmental influences; (b) perceptual information processing, since the focus of attention for the actor may be on the environment while for the observer it may be on the actor's behavior; and (c) self-esteem protection, since actors may be motivated to attribute the cause of undesirable behaviors to the environment rather than the self.

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The supporting evidence cited by Jones and Nisbett (Jones & Harris, 1967; Jones, Rock, Shaver, Goethals, & Ward, 1968; McArthur, 1972; Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Maracek, 1973) has been buttressed by more recent investigations which have attempted to define the necessary and sufficient conditions under which the actor-observer divergence may occur. For example, Storms (1973) used videotapes of "get acquainted" conversations which were played back to actors and matched observers. The typical actor-observer differences were obtained when subjects were shown a tape of the perspective they had already witnessed. These differences were reversed, however, when subjects were shown a tape of the opposite perspective (i.e., observers viewed a tape from the actor's perspective while actors viewed a tape of the observer's perspective).

This reversal of the actor-observer difference has been replicated in several other studies (e.g., Arkin & Duval, 1975; Miller, 1975, Experiment 4; Taylor & Fiske, 1975). In general, the research tends to support the conclusion that the divergence is in large part due to the different *perspectives* of the individuals in the situation. However, Regan and Totten (1975) point out that studies such as Storms (1973) and Taylor and Fiske (1975) are confounded since the perspective shift must naturally include an objective information increase as well. In the process of shifting the observers' focus of attention to the situation and the actors' focus to themselves, the manipulation gave subjects additional environmental and personal information that was not formerly available.

Regan and Totten attempted to alleviate this problem by manipulating both perspective shift and information increase, again through the use of videotaped "get acquainted" sessions. Observers were given either standard observer instructions or an empathic set modeled after Stotland's (1969) "imagine him" directions. Their results indicated that the attributions of empathic observers were more situational and less dispositional than the attributions of nonempathic observers, supporting the hypothesis that a perceptual focus of attention largely determines attributions. This research is complemented by a study performed by Duval and Wicklund (1973), who found that objectively self-aware actors' (self-focused) attributions were relatively less situational and more dispositional than the attributions made by subjectively self-aware actors (situation-focused).

These results suggest that for *both* actors and observers, the perspective (focus of attention) one assumes is sufficient to determine whether attributions are made to the actor or the environment. But unless something is done to alter one's characteristic focus of attention (e.g., inducing objective self-awareness, employing empathy instructions), actors attend to situational aspects while observers attend to the actor's dispositions.

Interestingly, the perspective hypothesis could indirectly bear on the long-standing controversy of whether and/or when a person's attitudes will affect subsequent behavior (e.g., Bem, 1972; Festinger, 1964; LaPiere, 1934; Wicker, 1969). It has been argued both that attitudes are largely irrelevant to the prediction of situation-specific behaviors and that attitudes are important, though not the only, causes of behaviors (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Snyder & Swann, 1975). Correlations between attitudes and behaviors are generally small, but often significant, across a variety of situations and studies, lending some degree of empirical support to both positions and no critical verdict for either. The perspective one takes in ex-

cogitating about the issue could play more than a minor role in how one describes the attitude-behavior relationship. The perspective hypothesis implies that (1) actors characteristically hold a more tenuous view of the relationship of their cognitive structures to possible actions than do observers, and (2) a kind of attributional "double standard" may be in effect, where actors are willing to "discount" the certainty of their own attitude-behavior links, but fail to make the same discount when in the role of observing another. Actors, typically focused on the environment, should tend to view their own attitude statements as only tentative orientations toward the world, orientations which *might* be implemented if "all other things were equal" or "nothing came up," but definitely not as invariant internal indicators of disposition which cause any specific behavior as a necessary and sufficient condition. Attitude-relevant future behaviors would be seen by the actor as highly affected by future situational contingencies. Observers, typically focused on the actor, should perform no such situational discounting, but should view an actor's attitude statements as at least partial evidence of an internal disposition that will cause subsequent behaviors consistent with the statement to occur. Thus, following an attitude statement such as "I like John," observers should predict that the actor would be willing to loan John money, want to go to the movies with him, help him to study for tests, and so on, and have high confidence in the accuracy of their predictions. Actors should interpret the statement differently; they should feel that these specific behaviors are not as likely to occur, since they would depend upon the future situation, and would have less confidence in whatever predictions they do make. Although several studies have examined the relationship between dispositional trait attributions and predictions of future behaviors (e.g., Gurwitz & Panciera, 1975; Langer & Roth, 1975; Miller, 1975; Nisbett, et al., 1973; Snyder & Frankel, 1976), the present study tested the generality of an attributional double standard as a judgmental bias under predictive attitude-behavior conditions.

Subjects read scenarios describing an interaction among several people. The central person in each made a statement about an attitude object, and subjects were asked (a) to predict the likelihood that the central person would respond in specific ways toward the object and (b) to indicate their confidence in their predictions. The major independent variable manipulation was the role that subjects were asked to assume. Half were given standard observer instructions, while the remainder were told to *imagine yourself actually saying and doing* the things being attributed to you. The latter actor instructions seem to go beyond standard manipulations of empathy which simply ask subjects to evaluate the situation from the perspective of *another person*. It was hypothesized that subjects who assumed the role of the central person (actors) would predict a smaller likelihood of occurrence of the specific behaviors and would have less confidence in their predictions than would subjects who assumed the role of observers. If such effects occur under conditions where actors and observers are given identical objective information and where the described behaviors are not undesirable, it would provide strong support for the conclusion that neither self-esteem protection nor differential access to objective information are necessary for the occurrence of actor-observer differences (possible subjective differences in these factors will be discussed later).

Additionally, the scenarios contained variations in the favorability of the attitude statement (e.g., "I like John" versus "I like John more than anyone else") and in the familiarity of the other group members to the central person. Both statement favorability and audience familiarity were hypothesized to increase the strength and confidence of behavioral predictions. People should learn to associate highly favorable statements with greater commitment toward the attitude object; people typically do not praise something unless they are committed in some way to it. Thus, the more favorable the attitude statement, the more it should be seen as an important personal disposition that should affect behavior. Audience familiarity should also be an important context variable. When interacting with unfamiliar others, attitude statements could serve more of an impression management function than an expressive function, and hence be seen as less revealing of one's "true" feelings. The statement might be seen merely as a way of currying favor with the unfamiliar audience or fitting in with the group. Thus, audience familiarity should affect the amount of perceived external pressure placed on the central person to make a particular statement. People should infer that the attitude statement is more reflective of underlying attitude strength when external pressure is low (familiar audience) rather than high (unfamiliar audience) (Bem, 1972). Further, attitude statements are more committing when they are made before friends rather than casual acquaintances. People should expect continued interaction with and monitoring by friends, and therefore say only what they really mean. Lastly, subjects responded to two different scenarios, one involving statements made about another person and one involving statements made about a political party. Though speculations could be advanced about possible effects of a personal versus extrapersonal attitude object, no specific predictions were made. The different scenarios were included to assess generalizability of the results.

Method

Subjects

One hundred and sixty-eight male and female introductory psychology students, 21 per cell of the four-factor mixed-design, participated to partially fulfill a course requirement.

Procedure

Subjects were run in groups, with booklets from different conditions randomly distributed within each group. To increase the generality of the interpretation, each booklet contained two short scenarios about different kinds of attitude objects. One referred to a central actor making a statement about another person (personal attitude object) and the other referred to a central actor making a statement about a political party (extrapersonal attitude object). The instructions for each booklet emphasized that subjects were to imagine either that they were the central person or that they were observing the central person. Within each scenario, the statement made by the central person expressed either moderate or high favorability to the attitude object and was made before a group of people

who were either well-known or little known. Hence, the design contained three between-subjects factors—respondent perspective (actor vs. observer), attitude favorability (high vs. moderate), and audience familiarity (high vs. low)—and one within-subjects factor—attitude object (personal vs. extrapersonal). Subjects were asked to carefully read the written instructions and proceed as directed, answering questions about each scenario that appeared in the booklet. When finished, subjects were thanked for their participation and permitted to leave.

Materials

The two short scenarios briefly described an interaction among several people, one of whom made an attitude-relevant statement. In the personal-attitude-object scenario, a group was said to be discussing people whom they all know, and the name "Pat" popped up in the conversation. (Pat and the central person were described to be of the subject's own sex, and Pat was said not to be present during the discussion group). The central person then expressed a favorable attitude toward Pat. In the extrapersonal-attitude-object scenario, the topic of "politics and political parties" was brought up in the group, and a discussion began. The central person then expressed a favorable attitude toward "party X." All subjects received both scenarios, with the order of presentation counterbalanced.

In the actor condition, the written instructions that preceded the two scenarios asked subjects to "imagine that you are in the group being described. Imagine that you actually are talking and listening to what is being said" and "that you are saying what is being attributed to you." The scenarios employed the word "you" throughout, and emphasized that "you" made the statements that concerned Pat and party X. In the observer condition, the written instructions asked subjects to "imagine that you are observing the group being described but are not participating in the discussion." The central person was designated by initials, e.g., T.N., thus allowing the actor and observer scenarios to be identical except for the substitution of phrases such as "T.N. makes the following statement" or "you make the following statement."

Familiarity of the audience was varied by either stating that individuals in the group knew one another very well (high familiarity) or that the group members were merely acquaintances who had gotten together for one of the first times (low familiarity). Favorability toward the attitude object was varied by the appropriate use of modifiers. For example, when discussing Pat, moderate favorability actors stated, "I like Pat. We have a fairly good time when we're together. Pat is one of the nicer people I know." High favorability actors, on the other hand, stated, "I really like Pat-very much. We have a great time whenever we're together. Pat is one of the greatest people I know."

The following example was the scenario used for the actor/high-familiarity/moderate-favorability/extrapersonal-attitude-object condition:

During lunch one day, you are talking with several friends and acquaintances. You know these people very well. At one point during the conversation one of the people in the group brings up the topic of politics and political parties, and a discussion begins. During the

conversation, you make the following statement: "I've been a member of party X for some time now. I've tried to examine all the issues carefully, and I firmly believe that the positions the party takes are in the best interests of the country. I've given the party my wholehearted support in the past and I'll definitely continue to do so in the future."

Dependent Variables

Each scenario was followed by nine questions. Two of the items were checks on the familiarity and commitment manipulations. Six of the items asked subjects to make specific predictions concerning future behaviors that could be related to the attitude object. For example, when the attitude object was personal, subjects were asked questions such as "How likely would you (T.N.) be to give time to help Pat study for a test?" and "How willing would you (T.N.) be to loan Pat money?" When the attitude object was extrapersonal, subjects were asked questions such as "How likely is it that you (T.N.) would contribute time for door-to-door campaigning on behalf of party X during the next election?" and "How likely is it that you (T.N.) would make a monetary contribution to party X during the next election?" Wherever possible, as in the above, items were equated in asking for time, money, etc. Other items asked for the likelihood of such occurrences as having a change of opinion or saying something negative about the attitude object. Finally, subjects were asked how confident they were of the correctness of their answers. Each of the nine items was followed by a 37-point scale marked with 7 verbal labels ranging from "not at all" to "extremely."

Results

Manipulation Checks

Both the familiarity and favorability manipulations were successful. Subjects in the high-familiarity condition ($M = 22.7$) felt that the group members liked one another more, $F(1,160) = 50.193$, $p < .01$, than did subjects in the low-familiarity condition ($M = 17.4$). Subjects in the high-favorability condition ($M = 29.6$) felt that the central person was more favorable toward the attitude object, $F(1,160) = 34.780$, $p < .01$, than did subjects in the moderate-favorability conditions ($M = 25.6$).

Predictions of Future Behavior

A four-factor, repeated measures analysis of variance was performed on the sum of subjects' responses to the six behavior predictions that followed each scenario. Main effects of both perspective, $F(1,160) = 5.349$, $p < .05$, and favorability, $F(1,160) = 8.037$, $p < .01$, were obtained. Supporting the major hypothesis, subjects believed that the central person was more likely to engage in attitude-relevant behaviors when they were in the role of observers rather than actors; means were 151.5 and 142.9, respectively. The favorability main effect indicated that subjects who had read the high-favorability statements believed that the attitude-relevant behaviors

were more likely to occur than subjects who had read moderate-favorability statements; means were 152.4 and 141.9, respectively. No other significant effects were obtained on the summed behavioral predictions.

Confidence in Predictions

Analysis of subjects' responses to the question, "How confident are you of your answers to the above questions?" (the item followed the six behavioral prediction measures) revealed main effects due to perspective, $F(1,160) = 12.191$, $p < .01$, and group familiarity, $F(1,160) = 4.285$, $p < .05$, and a three-way interaction between favorability, perspective, and attitude object, $F(1,160) = 4.552$, $p < .05$. As predicted, subjects who assumed the role of actors were less confident of their predictions than subjects who assumed the role of observers; means were 23.2 and 26.5, respectively. Additionally, subjects were less confident of their attributions when there was low-familiarity of the group members than when there was high-familiarity; means were 23.9 and 25.8, respectively.

Means for the three-way interaction are presented in Table 1. Observer-subjects were highly confident of their predictions irrespective of the degree of favorability expressed or the attitude object being described by the statement. The confidence of actor-subjects, on the other hand, was affected by both favorability and the attitude object, with actor-subjects expressing more confidence under high rather than moderate-favorability when the attitude object was personal; $t(160) = 1.99$, $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 1

Mean Ratings of Confidence in Attributions

Attitude Object	Condition			
	Actor Role		Observer Role	
	Moderate Favorability	High Favorability	Moderate Favorability	High Favorability
Personal	21.8	25.0	26.6	26.2
Extrapersonal	23.8	22.3	26.7	26.5

Discussion

The results clearly supported the major hypotheses that (a) observers are more willing than actors to assume that specific behaviors follow from an attitude statement, and (b) observers have greater confidence than actors

in predictions that are made about behaviors. Observers were apparently more willing to assume that an attitude statement reflects an underlying disposition that affects future behaviors, while actors apparently viewed the attitude statements more as an orientation toward the attitude object than as an inflexible linkage with the attitude object. There is thus some justification for asserting that some attributional "double standard" operates with generality not only in postdictive estimations of the attitude-behavior relationship, but also in predictive forecasts of the strength of this relationship.

The attitude-favorability and audience-familiarity manipulations produced effects that were generally consistent with the hypotheses. Favorability was directly related to subjects' behavioral predictions -- highly favorable attitude statements were seen as more likely to lead to specific behaviors than were less favorable statements. However, predictive confidence was affected by the interaction of favorability, perspective, and attitude object. Favorability did not affect observers' confidence ratings, and only affected actors' confidence ratings toward the personal attitude object. Perhaps an extreme statement about another person, as opposed to an extrapersonal object, produces greater perceived social pressure to live up to the statement's behavioral implications. Such an extreme personal statement might even be perceived by the actor as a sort of promise which must be fulfilled. Thus, actors' confidence ratings increase for whatever behavioral implications seem to follow an extreme personal statement.

Audience familiarity affected confidence in the hypothesized direction, with high familiarity producing greater confidence than low familiarity. However, familiarity did not affect behavioral predictions. Apparently, the favorability of an attitude statement primarily serves to delineate the behaviors which should follow from it, while the context of the situation (familiarity) only affects one's confidence in making these predictions. Why such a separation occurred between behavioral implications and confidence is unclear. Perhaps the specificity is due to the logical ramifications of the variables. People may first decide what behavioral implications exist; the more extreme the statement, the greater the implications. When they evaluate their confidence, though, they look to situational pressures which may have constrained the statement, e.g., was it made to friends or strangers? The fact that subjects rated the implications first and then their predictive confidence might have reinforced such a two-step process. Future research will be needed to explore the specificity effect.

The procedure used in the present experiment was successful in producing actor-observer differences despite the control of both objective information and motivation. Several possible explanations exist for these differences. The first, a derivative of the different-histories hypothesis (Jones & Nisbett, 1971), suggests that actors may have compared the descriptions of the central character with their own recalled past behaviors. The comparison may have led them to conclude that the depicted attitude statements were atypical of their own, so that any future behavior would be less likely to be linked to them. Given the nature of the attitude statements which were used, this seems unlikely; it would be rare to find a college student who has not made comparable statements at one or another time. Or, the actors may have recalled comparable personal

statements and remembered that few behaviors followed. However, if few behavioral implications actually do follow all actors' attitude statements, why would observers predict more such effects *and* have higher confidence in their ratings? Observers should be equally able to recall that people do not follow their words with deeds. However, it is impossible to rule out explanations based on such privately conjured information or motivation differences.

The overall pattern of results would seem to provide strong support for the perspective hypothesis. Causes of behaviors are attributed to the most salient element of the perceptual field (Duval & Wicklund, 1973; Pryor & Kriss, 1977; Wegner & Finstuen, 1977). Actors typically focus on the environment, obtaining adaptive information useful in planning behavioral contingencies. Observers typically focus on the actor, obtaining adaptive information that is useful in understanding and predicting what the actor will do. Such functional differences in focus allow people to best fulfill their goals in social situations.

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