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The Actor and Observer Bias in Causal Attribution: The Effects of Consistency and Perspective

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THE ACTOR AND OBSERVER BIAS IN CAUSAL ATTRIBUTION:
THE EFFECTS OF CONSISTENCY AND PERSPECTIVE

by

Joseph W. Wuerth

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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INTRODUCTION

The theory of causal attribution has its foundations in naive psychology (Heider, 1958), an attempt to explain human behavior from the layman's point of view. Basic to this approach is the assumption that all men attempt an understanding of human nature and that personal theories have a definite influence on subsequent behavior.

Attribution theory

Heider noted that an integral aspect of common sense psychology is the attribution of causality. The exact meaning of a particular behavior, as well as the appropriate response to it, is often uncertain. Knowledge of the determinants of the behavior can, however, aid in its interpretation. For instance, a behavior such as tardiness, may take on very different meanings depending upon whether it happened intentionally or accidentally.

Heider (1958) outlined an approach to the study of causal perception. The formal theories of attribution (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967) developed from the ideas of Heider's outline. First to appear was Jones and Davis' theory of correspondent inferences. Theirs is a theory of how humans perceive specific intentions or attributes from observations of specific actions. A

second, though complementary theory, was proposed by Kelley (1967) which can be referred to as the theory of external attribution. Basic to Kelley's theory is his concern with the differentiation of environmental from personal causality.

According to Jones and Davis, the perceiver attempts to label an attribute which has the highest correspondence to a given effect. Correspondence, for a particular attribute effect linkage, appears to increase as the attribute in question departs from the norm of social desirability. In other words, an attribute effect linkage which deviates from the norm has a greater probability of reflecting the actor's true intention.

Correspondence is also achieved through the examination of noncommon effects. Correspondence refers to the examination of the alternative actions which would have produced a different effect than that which occurred. This procedure may provide the perceiver with clues regarding the actor's exact goals or intentions.

Personal involvement of the perceiver with the effect also is assumed to influence the attribution process. Two levels of involvement have been distinguished, hedonic relevance and personalism. If an effect either promotes or interferes with the perceiver's goals it is said to be hedonically relevant. If the perceiver judges that he himself is the object of the action then a condition of personalism results. Correspondence is said to increase in direct proportion to increases in personal involvement.

Kelley (1967, 1971, 1972, 1973) has approached this problem

area from perhaps a wider perspective, considering not just an analysis of intentions but also the environmental and circumstantial determinants of behavior. This approach rests on the observation that persons are often seen as being determined by factors external to themselves. Particular then, to Kelley's approach is the problem of external versus internal causality.

Kelley's analysis describes two cases which may exist for an observer faced with the problem of attributing causality. In the first case the observer has information from multiple observations. In these cases the attributor must rely on what Kelley calls covariation concepts. In the second case the observer has information from only a single observation. In these cases he must rely on the configuration of possible causes in order to gain insight into the determining factors.

Formally stated, the principle of covariation asserts, "An effect is attributed to the one of its possible causes with which, over time it covaries" (Kelley, 1973, p. 108). Kelley uses an analysis of variance analogy to describe how such a principle operates in the observer. This model represents a three-way analysis of entities and persons over time. For example, if a behavior is seen to covary over time and entities for a particular individual, then attributions will tend to be personal. On the other hand, if a behavior is seen to covary over time across a number of persons then an environmental inference is the more likely cause.

Such an analysis can also be described in terms of three factors: the distinctive association of the response to the stimulus, the consensus of other persons' responses, and the consistency of the response over time and modalities. These factors, alone or in combination, produce information leading to distinctive types of attributive outcomes. For example, high distinctiveness inclines one to make an entity attribution, whereas low consensus leads to personal attributions.

In cases where only a single observation is made the attributor must rely on the availability of other sorts of information. Such information may concern the plausibility of other causes. The discounting principle represents the use of such information. Formally stated, the role of a given cause in producing a given effect is discounted if other plausible causes are also present. The discounting principle is an example of the configuration concept mentioned above. Another configuration concept is the augmentation principle. This principle refers to cases where an action takes place though inhibitory factors are present. Under this configuration, if an action took place in the presence of a strong external inhibitor, the attributions to the person would be augmented.

The use of these configuration concepts implies what Kelley calls causal schemata. A causal schema represents the assumed pattern of data regarding the possible causes in terms of a given effect and is an extension of the analysis of variance analogy. Each

configuration implies its corresponding schema. The discounting principle implies a multiple sufficient schema, while the augmentation principle implies the compensatory schema. A third case is the multiple necessary schema. Under these conditions, both internal and external causes must be present in order for the given effect to occur.

The actor and observer bias in causal attribution

Until recently the formal theories of attribution have neglected consideration of the actor and observer biases with regard to the perception of causality. Heider (1958) first observed that actors and observers tend to perceive the determinants of an action differently. Observers tend to attribute personal responsibility to the actor for his performance while actors tend to perceive their own behavior as a response determined by the particular situation.

Some evidence in support of the proposition has been gathered by researchers studying other aspects of attribution theory (Jones & Harris, 1967; Jones, Rock, Shaver, Goethals & Ward, 1968; Jones, Worchel & Grumet, 1971; McArthur, 1972). These researchers report that there is a tendency for observers to take the behavior of an actor at face value as indicative of his true intentions or dispositions. This tendency appeared to be one of the most potent determinants of the attribution process in these studies. Observers in the Jones and Harris (1967) study listened to pro Castro and anti Castro speeches by students supposedly on the college debate team. Half of the observers were under the impression that the students

were given no freedom in choosing the position of their talk while the other half of the observers were told that the students were given this freedom of choice. Regardless of the choice condition observers tended to assume that the communicators held the position espoused. The fact that a communicator was under heavy external pressure to perform in a particular way apparently had little effect on the observers tendency to make dispositional attributions. Recently, this same study was replicated by Jones, Worchel, Goethals and Grumet (1971), using the legalization of marijuana as the debate topic. Essentially the same results were obtained.

Attributions were made by both actor subjects and observer subjects in the Jones, Rock, Shaver, Goethals and Ward (1968) study. The experimenters provided their subjects with false feedback regarding the results of a rigged I. Q. test. Then they were asked whether the performance was due to item difficulty, a situational factor or the ability of the test taker, a dispositional factor. Actor subjects and observer subjects differed markedly in their attributions. Actor subjects tended to attribute changes in performance to changes in item difficulty. Observers, however, attributed changes in performance to variations in the ability of the performer.

McArthur (1972) attempted a lengthy study designed to test the accuracy of Kelley's notions concerning the effects of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus information in causal attribution.

Subjects were presented with short sentences which described the behavior of a hypothetical actor in terms of the above three factors. Although the experimental and control groups did differ in their attributions, the most frequent response for either group was a dispositional attribution.

More direct tests of this phenomenon have been attempted in an additional study by McArthur (1972) as well as studies by Nisbett, Caputo, Legant and Marecek (1971) and by Storms (1973). McArthur's research involved asking actor subjects why they consented to participate in a survey and then comparing their responses with those of observers who received a written report of the actor's behavior. As expected, actors thought that their behavior was due to the importance of the survey while the observers seemed to think that the actors' behavior was due to their predisposition to participate in surveys.

Nisbett, Caputo, Legant and Maracek (1971) conducted a series of experiments dealing directly with the bias. Their first effort was similar in design to McArthur's second experiment in that actors were induced to volunteer for a project while both actors and observers made causal attributions. The experiment differed from McArthur's in that the observers were actually present at the time of the performance. As expected, the observers assumed that the actors would behave in a similar manner on future occasions. This was interpreted as a dispositional attribution.

Actors themselves, however, did not share in this assumption, believing instead that their behavior was limited to that particular situation. In a second study, the researchers asked their subjects to describe the reasons for their own and their best friend's choices of a girl friend and college major. Subjects were found to describe their own choices as resulting from the unique qualities of the choice object. On the other hand, descriptions of the reasons for the best friend's choices reflected the unique dispositional properties of the friend. A third study required subjects to describe a stimulus person in trait or situational terms. The stimulus persons used were the subject himself, a best friend, his father, an admired acquaintance and the television commentator Walter Cronkite. The results indicated that subjects used a significantly greater number of trait adjectives while describing another than when describing themselves.

A final study, to be described in greater detail in another section, lends still more evidence to this proposition that actors and observers perceive the cause of behavior differently. An experiment conducted by Storms (1973) required previously unacquainted actor subjects to converse with each other for a brief time. Observer subjects were also present. Essentially no other manipulations took place for several conditions of this experiment. In these conditions, actors demonstrated a strong tendency to attribute their behavior to factors related to the situation. Con-

versely, observers tended to make attributions in terms of the actor's disposition.

Theoretical considerations

In view of the abundance of evidence, Jones and Nisbett (1971) have attempted a thorough theoretical treatment of this phenomenon. This difference between actor's and observer's perceptions of causality was thought to stem from possible differences in the information available to the actor and observer concerning the actor's behavior and also from possible differences in the way the present behavioral data is perceived.

Obviously the observer lacks much information which may be useful in the determination of causality. This information would consist of knowledge of the actor's subjective experience concerning his emotions and intentions and his perceptions of the situation. The observer may also lack knowledge of how the actor has performed in the past. Jones and Nisbett (1972) have proposed that this difference in the knowledge of the actor's past behavior may, in part, account for the observer's tendency to rely on the actor's present behavior in determining causality. This historical data concerning the actor's behavior represents what Kelley (1967) has labeled as consistency data. Consistency data represents one of the clues in determining personal or situational causality. If a person responds consistently in a certain manner across a wide variety of situations, then an inference of personal causality tends

to be made. On the other hand, if the actor responds inconsistently, then there is reason to conclude that his behavior depends upon the situation. The research of McArthur (1972) appears to confirm the above proposition. Subjects were presented with short descriptions of an actor's behavior. Distinctiveness, consensus and consistency information were included in the descriptions with the various levels of these factors varied across descriptions. Consistency information proved to be a powerful factor leading to greater personal attributions when consistency was high and a greater number of situational attributions when consistency was low.

Since observers often lack consistency type information about the actor, they are forced to weigh what other information they possess more heavily. This lack of information would lead one to expect a tendency for the observer to take the present behavior at face value. On the other hand, the actor is liable to recall at least several instances when he responded differently in a similar situation. This additional information might predispose the actor to treat his present behavior as less indicative of his true disposition than would an observer.

A second possible explanation for the actor and observer differences in attributions may be found in the divergence of perspectives from which they view the behavioral sequence. Jones and Nisbett have observed that the first person or actor point of view is one in which the focus of attention is primarily directed

upon the environmental situation rather than upon the behavior itself. It is thought that this perspective is due, at least in part, to the outward orientation of one's sensory apparatus. Thus the orientation of the actor is such that he attends to and utilizes the information concerning the situation more than that of his own behavior.

On the other hand, the observer's orientation is better suited to view the behavior of the actor since the actor is a part of the observer's environment. There is a tendency, then, for the observer to attend to and utilize more of the information concerning the actor's behavior than the actor does himself.

These divergent perspectives for actors and observers which lead to differences in the attention to and the utilization of data could conceivably account for their apparent disagreement concerning the attribution of causality.

Support for this hypothesis is found in the study (Storms, 1973) in which perspective was manipulated through an alteration of the subjects' visual orientation towards a behavioral sequence. After viewing the behavioral sequence in vivo, a number of actors and observers reviewed the incident through the use of videotape. For half of these subjects, both actors and observers, a reorientation of perspective took place. This was accomplished by showing the subjects a videotape taken from a camera angle which differed from their original angle of view. For observers, the change in

perspective was from the third person point of view. For actors, the change was from the first person to the third. The remaining subjects in this experiment either re-experienced the behavior from their original point of view or received no videotape exposure at all. This study revealed that actors who viewed their own behavior from the third person (observer) perspective would tend to reverse the actor bias and make predominantly dispositional attributions. Likewise, observers who viewed the actor's behavior from the first person (actor) perspective were found to perceive the situation as the cause of the behavior. Thus, it appears as though visual perspective differences can account for some of the actor and observer differences in causal attribution.

The relative effectiveness of information and perspective

Consistency information as well as perspective have been established as influential in determining perceptions of causality. It is not clear, however, which mechanism is the more powerful factor or if they interact in some way. The degree of emphasis to be placed on each of these mechanisms has been a point of theoretical disagreement. Heider, it appears, emphasized the effects of information while Jones and Nisbett emphasize perspective. A determination of the more influential factor would appear necessary in attempting to draw a conclusion regarding the generality of the phenomenon. Perspective differences between actors and observers are relatively invariant. If perspective is the more

crucial factor, then one would expect a persistence of the actor and observer disagreement across various degrees of familiarity, similarity or any other factor which might tend to increase the amount of information shared by the actor and observer. If, on the other hand, perspective is a relatively weak mechanism operating effectively only when other information is lacking, then one may discount the all pervasiveness of the phenomenon under conditions where a real effort has been made to supply the observer with the necessary information.

Jones and Nisbett's emphasis upon perspective may be due to the persistence of the observer bias in such studies (i. e. Jones and Harris, 1967; McArthur, 1972) where compelling situational information was supplied. However, there is some evidence that the degree of acquaintance, and hence knowledge of the actor's past behavior, may attenuate the effects of perspective. This evidence comes from the third study reported by Nisbett et. al. (1971). They observed that within a specific category of acquaintance, greater familiarity with the stimulus person decreased the tendency to assign traits. This evidence, however, is only correlational and may reflect other factors than just knowledge of the actor's past.

The relative effectiveness of these two factors could be measured in an experiment which would simultaneously manipulate perspective and the presence or absence of consistency type information. However, on the basis of the available evidence, specific hypotheses seem unwarranted. A number of possible outcomes

could result. If perspective was the overwhelmingly potent mechanism, then the presence or absence of either consistent or inconsistent information should have negligible effects. If perspective was only important when other information is lacking, then one should observe strong perspective effects under an absence of information condition and small perspective effects when either consistent or inconsistent information is provided. If, however, both perspective and information are equally important, then uniformly significant results should be obtained with no interactions.

METHOD

Overview

This experiment consisted of a manipulation of both perspective and information in a two by three factorial design with subjects randomized across conditions. The manipulation of perspective varied from the first person to the third person point of view. Consistent, inconsistent and consistency irrelevant information was presented in a three-way manipulation of this variable. These manipulations were carried out in terms of a videotape which depicted the behavior of a principle character along a dimension of generosity. The tape consisted of two sections. The first section provided the manipulation of consistency. The second section consisted of the critical behavioral sequence for which the attributions were to be made.

First, a series of four scenes took place in which a history of behavior relevant to generosity was formed. In the consistent condition, all four scenes represented instances of generous behavior. Inconsistency of behavior was conveyed by having the actor behave in a non-generous fashion in the first and fourth scenes while behaving in a generous fashion in the remaining two. A third condition where consistency type information was lacking altogether was produced by padding the four scenes with material which was unrelated to the behavior in question.

In the original design of this experiment, the manipulation

of perspective was to have taken place in this first section as well as in the second. This would have consisted of presenting the four prior scenes as well as the final one from the actor and observer points of view. After the initiation of the experiment, but before the final data were collected and analyzed, it became apparent to the experimenter that this method would introduce the possibility of several alternative yet plausible hypotheses in regard to the effects of consistency. The correct isolation of the consistency variable necessitates that the history be presented in an identical manner across levels of perspective. A simultaneous manipulation of the two variables might cause them to interact in such a way as to alter the subject's perception of the information variable. Thus, it would not be possible to make clear comparisons of the effects of perspective across similar levels of information.

An alternative design presented the manipulation of the perspective variable only during the final scene of the tape. In this final scene the principle actor engaged in an extended example of generous behavior. The subjects were required to make their attributional responses in regards to this scene.

The videotape

The total film consisted of five short scenes, the first four lasting about thirty seconds each, the final one taking almost two minutes. The film appears to follow a typical Loyola University student through some typical casual campus encounters. In the

initial scene the actor approached a male student attempting to make a telephone call. In both the consistent and inconsistent conditions the phone caller requested a dime from the actor. The actor either complied (consistent) or refused (inconsistent). In the consistency irrelevant condition the phone caller made no requests of the actor. The second scene did not vary between conditions of consistency and depicted the actor in conversation with a couple of friends who ultimately ask him if he would drop a book off at the library. The actor then agreed to do the favor. In the condition of irrelevant information no request of the actor was made. The third scene depicted the actor providing a fellow male student with directions. This scene also did not vary across conditions relevant to consistency but in the condition of irrelevant information the actor only passed the student at the entrance to an escalator. In the fourth scene a young co-ed accidentally dropped her books near the actor. The actor either assisted (consistent) or ignored her (inconsistent). In the irrelevant information condition the girl just passed by.

The final scene depicted the behavior upon which the attributions were made. The actor's behavior was constant throughout all three conditions of information. The episode began as the actor approached an attractive young co-ed stranded along the road with a flat tire. She petitioned the actor for aid and in all cases he obliged.

Taken individually, these five scenes were presented in

such a manner as to appear ambiguous with respect to the dispositional and situational characteristics of the actor's behavior. It was anticipated that this ambiguity would aid in the proper functioning of the manipulations.

Subjects

One hundred eighteen male and female Loyola University undergraduate students participated in this experiment as part of their laboratory requirement for an introductory psychology course.

Procedure

A videotape monitor was set up in a large room adequate to accommodate half of the required subjects for each condition. The experimenter instructed the subjects in the following manner:

This experiment consists of the viewing of a short film, about four minutes in length, which follows a typical Loyola student during his everyday travels through campus. Your job, as participants in this experiment, is to be as attentive as possible while watching this film. Afterward, you will be asked to answer a few questions concerning the content of this film.

The tape was then shown. Immediately afterwards the dependent measures were distributed.

Dependent measures

The subjects were presented with a series of questions preceded by a page of instructions. The instructions were as follows:

The following section of this questionnaire concerns your impressions of the principal character's behavior during the final scene of the film. You will be asked to describe his

behavior along a standard dimension of generosity. Then you are to indicate how much influence each of the following two factors had in causing him to behave in the way he did. The first of these two factors is the Personal Characteristics about the student. For example, his personality traits, character, personal style, attitudes, mood, and so on. The second factor is the Characteristics of the Situation. For example, such factors might be the location of the incident, the nature of the other persons involved, how these other persons behaved, the presence of observers, as well as any other unique aspects of the circumstance.

Each of these questions is followed by a nine step scale. The ends of the scales are labelled with extreme and opposite adjectives. The numbers toward the middle of the scale represent the various degrees intervening between the two adjectives. You are to circle the number which best fits your impression of the actor's behavior.

The dependent measures followed closely those utilized by Storms (1973). This was done in order to increase the comparability of the two experiments. The first and fourth questions comprised the Present Behavior-General Behavior (PB-GB) Index. This is an indirect measure of the degree to which the subjects thought the principal character's behavior was due to the situation. The first question measured the subjects' perception of the actor's level of generous behavior in the final scene (present behavior). The fourth question determined the actor's general level of generosity. The scores from these two measures were then subtracted and the absolute difference indicated the degree of situational attribution. An absolute difference was used since any deviation of present behavior from general behavior was indicative of situational determination. These two questions were phrased as follows:

To what extent, in the final scene, did the student behave in a generous manner?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9
 very very
 self-seeking generous

How generous a person do you feel this student is in general?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9
 very very
 self-seeking generous

The second and third questions comprized the key dependent measure of attribution. The second question measured the degree of dispositional attribution. The third measured the degree of situational attribution. The situational scores for each subject was then subtracted from his dispositional scores to produce the Dispositional-Situational (D-S) Index. A positive score on this index indicates a dispositional attribution while a negative score indicates a situational attribution. These questions were as follows:

How important was the student's personal characteristics in determining his behavior during the final scene?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9
 very very
 unimportant important

How important were the characteristics of the situation found in the final scene in determining his behavior in the final scene?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9
 very very
 unimportant important

A few filler items followed before the measurement of the degree of consistency perceived to exist between the prior and final scenes. The question was as follows:

Did you find the behavior of the actor in the final scene consistent with his behavior prior to this scene?

1----	2----	3----	4----	5----	6----	7----	8----	9
very							very	
inconsistent							consistent	

RESULTS

Manipulation check

Before examining the effects of the experimental variables on attribution scores a consideration of their effectiveness as manipulations is in order. Since the manipulation of perspective represented a rather straightforward mechanical procedure manipulation checks were not deemed necessary.

The manipulation check for the information factor consisted of a question which dealt with the degree to which the actor's prior behavior was felt to be consistent or inconsistent with his behavior during the critical scene. The relevant data for this measure are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1.

Consistency Means

Information

Perspective
of Final Scene

First
Person

Third
Person

	Consistent	Inconsistent	Irrelevant
First Person	7.16 _{ab}	5.77 _{bc}	6.16 _b
Third Person	8.05 _a	4.50 _c	6.05 _b

Those cells not sharing the same subscript differ at the .05 level. The higher mean indicate a greater perception of consistency.

The analysis of variance indicated a significant main effect in the predicted direction for the information factor ($F=10.80$, $df=2/102$, $p < .01$,) with no interactions. Comparisons of conditions, using the Duncan's Multiple Range Test, reveal that significant differences did exist between conditions of consistent and inconsistent information. This difference, however, only reached the .10 level in the comparison of consistency levels within the first person perspective. All other comparisons between consistent and inconsistent conditions did reach significance at the .01 level. Within the third person perspective, all comparisons of inconsistent and consistent conditions with conditions of irrelevant information differed at significant levels ($p < .05$). Significant differences of this sort were not found within the first person perspective. In addition, within the level of inconsistent information, differences were indicated between levels of perspective, though only at the .10 level. It would appear as though the manipulation met the minimum standards of effectiveness. However, note should be taken of the fact that a much weaker effect occurred under the first person perspective.

The dispositional-situational index

The D-S index represented the major dependent variable in the study. Table 2 presents the data for this measure. An analysis of variance indicated that a main effect occurred under the information variable ($F=8.48$, $df=2/102$, $p < .01$). A main effect did not occur for the perspective variable ($F=1$, $df=1/102$, n. s.) Thus it would appear that the information variable was the more crucial

factor in determining attributions.

TABLE 2.
Attribution means for the D-S Index
Information

Perspective
of Final Scene

	Consistent	Inconsistent	Irrelevant
First Person	0 abc	-1.94 b	-.388 abc
Third Person	1.50 a	-1.94 b	-.722 bc

Those cells not sharing the same subscript differ at the .05 level. The more positive the means the greater the attribution to the person.

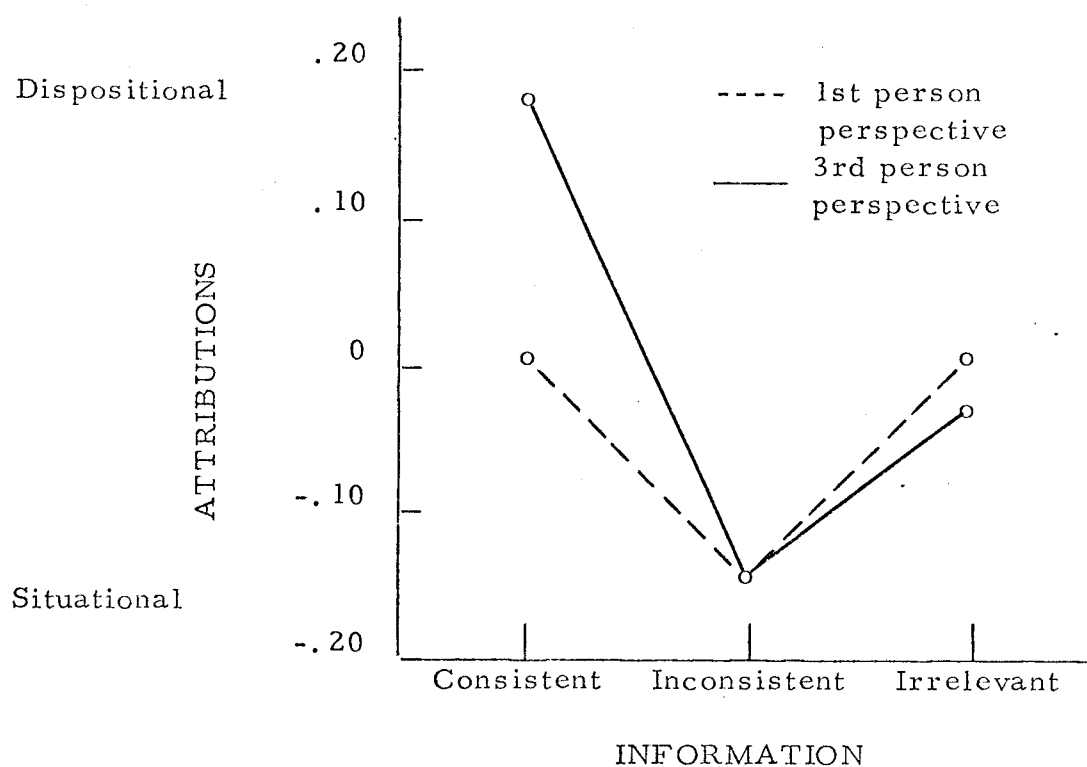
An examination of individual comparisons using the Duncan's Test indicates that subjects from both perspective conditions who received consistent information concerning the actor's behavior made more dispositional attributions than either groups receiving inconsistent information. Although these differences are significant at the .01 level for the third person perspective comparisons, they are only significant at the .10 level for subjects receiving the first person perspective. In addition, the presence of consistent information had some effect in inflating dispositional attributions over those that occurred when irrelevant information was presented. This, however, was only noticed for subjects viewing the tape under the third person perspective ($p < .05$).

Although the main effects of perspective are negligible, a significant interaction did occur between information and the point of view ($F=3.90$, $df=2/102$, $p < .05$) as seen in Figure 1 (P. 26). In this interaction, the only notable difference in attributions within levels of information but across levels of perspective occurs under the consistency condition. Apparently, the first person perspective interacted in some way with the consistency information to depress dispositional scores. The difference between attributions at this point is at best only marginally significant at the .10 level.

The present behavior-general behavior index

The PB-GB index measures the degree to which the actor's behavior was felt to deviate from his behavior in general. High scores on this index indicate greater deviation and hence greater situational attribution than low scores. Table 3 contains the data for this index. Consistent with the analysis for the D-S index, a significant main effect for information was obtained ($F=5.69$, $df=2/102$, $p < .05$). However, the PB-GB measure showed a slight effect for perspective ($F=3.39$, $df=1/102$, $p < .10$). Unlike the case with the D-S measure, a significant interaction was not found. The analysis of individual comparisons indicates that these main effects can be predominately attributed to the extremely high situational scores found in the condition of the first person perspective-inconsistent information. This cell significantly differed from all others at the .05 level using the Duncan's Multiple Range Test.

FIGURE I



Attribution means of first and third perspectives across levels of information for the D-S Index.

TABLE 3.

Attribution means for the PB-GB Index

Information

Perspective
of Final SceneFirst
PersonThird
Person

Consistent	Inconsistent	Irrelevant
1.00 _b	1.88 _a	.94 _b
.72 _b	1.27 _b	.77 _b

Those cells not sharing the same subscript differ at the .05 level. The higher mean indicate greater attributions to the person.

DISCUSSION

Summary of results

The manipulation of consistency type information appears to have been a valid one in that the manipulation check, consisting of consistency ratings yielded significant differences between levels of this factor. The manipulation of perspective, consisting of a rather straightforward mechanical procedure, should also be considered valid.

Considering this evidence of internal validity one may then state that in this present effort, prior information rather than perspective appears to be the factor which determined attributions of causality. This conclusion is based upon data from two measures of attributions, each indicating a main effect for information and only marginal effects for perspective. These marginal effects for perspective consisting of the significant interaction obtained with the D-S index and the slight main effect indicated with the PB-GB index.

Questions of external validity - a comparison with Kelley and Storms

The external validity of this study should be considered. The influences of prior information are basically in agreement with those predicted from Kelley's theory of attribution (Kelley, 1967). Overall, consistent information produced somewhat higher dispositional ratings than did inconsistent information, which tended to influence a situational rating. Individual comparisons, however, were not consistently significant in this regard. For instance, in the analysis of

the PB-GB measure, the comparison between levels of information within the third person perspective failed to reach significance even at a .10 level. In addition, conditions where consistent or inconsistent information was presented often failed to differ from those conditions where consistency irrelevant information was presented. This is especially evident in the analysis of the PB-GB measure where attribution totals for groups who received consistent prior information were identical with those who received irrelevant information. It is also evidenced in the analysis of the D-S index where comparisons of irrelevant information conditions failed to differ significantly from those groups receiving either condition of inconsistent information along with first person perspective and those groups receiving inconsistent information with the third person perspective. These observations may be indicative of the limits of effect on information to influence attribution. However, it is also plausible to suppose that a ceiling effect was reached under the extreme levels of information. Differences in the intermediate range would then be insignificant.

The data from this study should also be examined with respect to the research of Storms (1973). In that experiment an extremely potent effect was obtained from the manipulation of perspective. Though no manipulation of prior information was attempted in the Storms' research, the two experiments are comparable if one considers those conditions of the present experiment where consistency irrelevant information was present. It was within these

conditions that the pure effects for perspective were supposedly measured. Neither for the D-S or the PB-GB measure were the levels of perspective found to differentially influence attributions within this level of information. One possible explanation for this finding might be that a threshold effect occurred. In other words, the influence of perspective was not in itself strong enough to produce observable differences in attributions. This factor, however, in combination with consistent or inconsistent information surpassed the threshold. Thus, the influence of perspective was only observed under conditions of consistency relevant information.

Storms, nevertheless, did observe significant differences between levels of perspective. His method differs from that of the present experiment in that Storms' subjects experienced a re-orientation of perspectives. The contrast between the first and second orientations may have heightened the saliency of cues pertinent to a change in attributions. The fact that a re-orientation occurred may prove to be crucial in the attainment of a strong perspective effect.

Conclusions and questions

Though factors related to information had the greater influence in the present study, caution must be exercised in drawing any general conclusions regarding the determinants of the actor and observer bias. The plausibility of Jones and Nisbett's (1972) proposal that perspective differences account for the bias remains strong.

Any factor which could account for the bias must possess certain qualifications. The levels of this factor must characterize a reliable and distinctive difference between actors and observers. Perspective represents a very parsimonious choice in that it represents a rather basic and persistent difference between actors and observers. The fact that perspective had little influence in the present study suggests the possibility that perspective differences in vivo may encompass more than just those determined by visual orientation. The actor's attention to his environment may also be due to certain motivational factors. Certainly a high degree of environmental surveillance is required for survival. A response is adaptive only insofar as it meets the requirements of the situation. Thus there is a possibility that the utilization of situational information may be quite different for an actor in vivo as compared with an actor simulation with videotape.

The choice of consistency type information as the determining factor for the actor and observer bias rests on the assumption that actors generally perceive their behavior as less consistent than do observers. As pointed out by Heider (1958) and Jones and Nisbett (1972), this may be a reasonable assumption. However, one may not assume that such information is present in natural settings to the same degree found in the present experiment. Thus one has little assurance that consistency type information is such an important variable outside the experimental laboratory.

Additional research concerning the determinants of the actor and observer bias is required before any general conclusion can be drawn. Such research should be attempted in both laboratory as well as in more naturalistic settings. Note should be taken regarding what differences exist between the two procedures and results. Only then will one be able to correctly estimate the true effect of perspective and consistency in person perception.

SUMMARY

Two variables were investigated as relevant to the determination of the actor and observer bias in causal attribution. These two variables, visual perspective and information regarding the consistency of an actor's behavior were simultaneously manipulated in a two by three factorial design. Subjects viewed a videotape which provided consistent, inconsistent, or consistency irrelevant information regarding an actor's tendency to behave in a generous manner. In a final scene the actor engaged in an example of generous behavior. This scene was either viewed by the subjects from the first person perspective or from the third person perspective. The dependent measures of attribution were then distributed. Subjects indicated the degree to which the actor's behavior was determined by the situation and by his disposition. Consistency type information rather than visual perspective was found to have the greater influence in determining causal attributions. Subjects receiving information which portrayed the actor as consistently generous felt that his actions were determined by his disposition. Conversely, the portrayal of inconsistency with regard to generosity led subjects to make situational attributions. Though the data was only marginally significant, there was some tendency for perspective to affect attributions. Subjects who viewed the sequence from the first person perspective tended to make more

situational attributions than did those subjects who viewed the sequence from the third person perspective.



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APPROVAL SHEET

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The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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