

ATTRIBUTIONS FOLLOWING INFLUENCE ATTEMPTS:  
A COGNITIVE, INFORMATIONAL APPROACH

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B.S., University of Wisconsin, 1972

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A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTERS OF SCIENCE

Department of Psychology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1975

Approved by:

  
Major Professor

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**THIS BOOK  
CONTAINS  
NUMEROUS PAGES  
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Much of the research concerning the attribution of causality for a person's behavior has focused on cases in which there is no interaction between the subject and the person about whom causal attributions are to be made. This is exemplified by studies on attribution of responsibility (Feather, 1969; Reisman and Schopler, 1973), differences in attribution between the actor and the observer (Jones and Nisbett, 1971; Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, and Marecek, 1973), and the attribution of attitudes (Jones and Harris, 1971; Jones, Worchel, Goethals, and Grumet, 1971). In these studies, subjects were typically asked to read about the behavior of a fictitious stimulus person with whom they had no interactions, and then asked to make certain kinds of attributions about the stimulus person's behavior. In our everyday lives however, it is probably true that the people we are most interested in making attributions about are the people with whom we must interact.

One common kind of interaction occurs when we make attempts to influence or change another person's behavior. For example:

Dear Abby,

I have been married to Joe for three years and I'm almost going out of my mind as a result of this habit Joe has.

Whenever we have company over, Joe keeps talking and talking until our company is bored to death and a whole

beautiful evening is spoiled. We've lost I don't know how many friends this way. And don't think that I haven't tried changing him. I've tried every way I know to get him to change - I've threatened him with divorce, I've tried reasoning with him ... but none of my efforts are of any avail. He seems to be born this way and there's nothing I can do to change it.

I really love Joe but this habit of his is ruining our whole social life and driving me up the walls. What should I do?

A desperate wife.

The above fictitious example illustrates an important and frequent kind of interaction - that of an attempt by one person to change the behavior of the other. Whether these attempts succeed or fail may have serious implications for the causal attributions of the other's behaviors and for attributions of personality traits to the other, and thus, may affect the subsequent behaviors of the behavior modifier towards the other. For example, if the wife in the previous example saw the failure of her husband to change as her own fault (self-attribution), she might want to change some of her own behavior patterns. But if she saw it as her husband's fault (other-attribution), then she might very well decide that he is an inconsiderate, socially inept person, give up trying to change him, and seek a separation.

The present experiment is intended to explore the kinds of causal attributions and trait attributions subjects might make about another person after attempting to influence (change) this other person's behavior. An attempt to change the behavior of another person may be defined as a situational (external) force acting on the other. Then, following Jones and Davis (1965), it is hypothesized that any behavior on the part of a person which is in the direction of a situational (external) force could be seen as caused possibly by the external force and/or by the person's personality characteristics (internal cause). Thus, after modifying another's behavior, we may be unsure to what extent the change in the other was caused by our change attempts (external forces) or by the person's internal characteristics (e.g., a decision to change, or his "true self" finally showing itself, a mood change, etc.). In other words, behavior which is in line with external causes may not be very informative about the "true" personality of the person. Under these circumstances, we would expect ratings of various traits which the person might have to be fairly moderate (not extreme) and made with little confidence.

On the other hand, Jones and Davis (1965) suggest that a behavior which is contrary to situational forces would be seen as definitely not caused by the external force, but instead caused by the person's characteristics. So, if we attempt to change another's behavior but he continues to