AN ATTRIBUTION–EMOTION MODEL OF HELPING BEHAVIOR

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Summary.—To investigate the help-giving judgment of the attribution–emotion model further, data from five manifest variables of controllability, responsibility, anger, sympathy, and help-giving, were subjected to path analysis, which provided an easy interpretation of the model. Participants were 90 men and 81 women in an introductory psychology course.

Attribution theorists have discussed various causal properties known as causal dimensions on the achievement-related domain. One of these causal dimensions is labeled controllability, which refers to the capacity to alter a cause volitionally (see Weiner, 1986). Causal controllability, in turn, is a major determinant of the perception of responsibility. A number of investigations based on the attribution–emotion model to examine helping behavior have indicated a cognitive sequence of perceived controllability—responsibility–anger–neglect, and the other sequence of perceived uncontrollability—no responsibility–sympathy–help (Meyer & Mulherin, 1980; Weiner, 1980a, 1980b, 1993; Reisenzein, 1986).

The present article re-examined the attribution–emotion model for the help-giving judgment by path analysis. The subjects were 90 male and 81 female introductory psychology students. Tested in groups of 2 to 10, they were given a questionnaire describing a hypothetical helping situation. The hypothetical helping scenario was selected from Kohlberg’s (1969) moral dilemma about Heinz, and parts of the story were modified into, for example, to “a person,” rather than Heinz, living in the neighborhood and asking to borrow money from you rather than to consider breaking into the store to steal a drug. After subjects read the scenario, they were asked to answer the following five questions using 6-point rating scales. Controllability: “How controllable, do you think, is the cause of the person’s present condition?” (1 = not at all under personal control and 6 = completely under personal control). Responsibility: “How responsible, do you think, is that person for his present condition?” (1 = not at all responsible and 6 = very much responsible). Anger: “How angry would you feel at that person?” (1 = not at all and 6 = very much). Sympathy: “How much sympathy would you feel for that person?” (1 = none at all and 6 = very much). Help-giving: “How likely is it that you would help that person?” (1 = definitely would not help and 6 = definitely would help).

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To test the attribution-emotion model, CALIS from SAS was used to carry out path analysis. Fig. 1 shows the path diagram of the analysis for five manifest variables. The chi-squared value of the model was significant ($\chi^2 = 8.72, p < .04$), which suggests that there is a discrepancy between the model and the data. Except for the $\chi^2$, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was .98, adjusted GFI was .90, and the comparative fit index was .95. The fit between the model and the data seems fair, with GFI statistics exceeding .90, despite a significant value of the chi-squared statistic.

As shown in Fig. 1, there were interesting cognitive sequences to arrive at a help-giving judgment. The causal controllability exerted its influence on help-giving judgment indirectly through the perception of responsibility and the feeling of sympathy. The direct path from controllability to responsibility and then to help-giving, however, was not significant. Contrary to the attribution theorists, the path coefficient between anger and help-giving was not significant but was slightly negative.

REFERENCES


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