

Attributions for Expectancy Violating Changes in Affectionate Behavior in Platonic Friendships

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ABSTRACT. Although affectionate communication is vital for the maintenance of close, personal relationships, it has the potential to generate negative as well as positive outcomes, which may in part be a function of what attributions are made for affectionate expressions. The present experiment applied principles of attribution theory to unexpected changes in affectionate communication within dyads of adult platonic friends. Results indicated that attributions are more often made for decreases in affection than for increases. Contrary to the prediction of the fundamental attribution error, all the participants more often made external, noncontrollable attributions for changes in affectionate behavior, and the intimacy level of the friendship moderated this effect. Finally, the types of attributions made were associated with a recipient's evaluations of the giver's affectionate behavior and his or her assessment of the giver's character.

WITHIN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, few forms of communication may be simultaneously as valued and as risk laden as the communication of affection. The importance of affection in close relationships can hardly be disputed; Rotter, Chance, and Phares (1972) called affection one of six fundamental human needs; others have stressed its importance in therapeutic settings and in developmental processes (Bowlby, 1953; Frank, 1973). Indeed, expressions of affection are often treated as critical incidents in the advancement of a relationship, and their absence may be taken as evidence of its deterioration (Owen, 1987).

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Despite benefits, expressions of affection may invite a number of risks. Perhaps the most evident risk is that the sentiment will not be reciprocated, leaving the giver in a face-compromising position (Shimanoff, 1985). Other risks, however, are associated with the interpretations and causal attributions made for such expressions. For example, an affectionate expression may not be interpreted as sincere but may be attributed to ulterior motives, such as an attempt to advance a premature commitment or sexual involvement. Indeed, affectionate behavior can be used strategically for these and other purposes (see Booth-Butterfield & Trotta, 1994).

Moreover, the intended meaning of the expression may be fundamentally misunderstood. A verbal expression of love, for example, may be intended to communicate platonic love but may be interpreted as a romantic sentiment. Although these risks plague affectionate communication to varying degrees in most relationship types, they may be magnified in platonic relationships because affection is so often associated with romance. That is, the potential romantic implications of an unexpected hug or kiss may not be troublesome in a romantic relationship but they may be significantly so in a platonic friendship.

One theoretic framework for studying individuals' causal judgments for interpersonal behavior is provided by attribution theory. Attributions are inferences individuals make about observed behavior and about the causality and responsibility underlying that behavior (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1972).

Attributions appear to be more common when the observed behavior is unexpected than when it is expected. According to expectancy theories, such as expectancy violations theory (Burgoon & Hale, 1988), the violation of one's expectation causes one to increase cognitive efforts to understand the cause and meaning of the observed behavior. Expectancy conforming behavior should not be as likely to elicit attributions because the causal inference is probably inherent in the expectancy. Attributions also appear to be more likely for negatively valenced behavior than for behavior judged as positive, regardless of the quality of the relationship between actor and observer (Camper, Jacobson, Holtzworth-Munroe, & Schmalig, 1988; Manusov, Floyd, & Kerssen-Griep, 1997).

In the present study, we applied the principles of attribution theory to the study of affectionate communication in platonic relationships. Some research has been devoted to people's attributions for expressions of affection, but this research has been limited to verbal behavior and generally has not codified attributions along causality or responsibility dimensions (at least explicitly). Moreover, existing research has relied on naturally occurring affectionate expressions, making it difficult to observe whether the expectedness of the behavior influences the attribution-making process.

In this study, we have attempted to extend research on attributions for affectionate behavior by creating expectancy violating situations and by coding attributions for affectionate behavior (including both verbal and nonverbal behavior) to examine influences on attribution types. Existing research on attributions for

affection has been summarized, followed by the formal justification and presentation of hypotheses.

Attributions for Affectionate Behavior

Although some studies have examined attributional accounts for expressions of affection, they have focused exclusively on naturally occurring verbal behavior in romantic relationships. Owen (1987), for example, studied the initial verbal expression of love as a critical incident in romantic dyads. Respondents kept diary records of their interactions with a romantic partner over a 4- to 5-month period. If an initial verbal expression of love was made within the relationship, respondents described and provided attributions for it. Owen reported that initial verbal expressions of love were made more often by men than by women. His interpretation of the attributional accounts identified four possible explanations: (a) men use the initial expression of love as a way to elicit premature commitment to relationships by women; (b) men are less able than women to withhold the expression of felt love; (c) women are better able than men to distinguish love from related emotions; and (d) women interpret the female role as reactive rather than proactive.

In an extension of Owen's study, Booth-Butterfield and Trotta (1994) identified five attributions made for the initial expression of love in a romantic relationship. First, it may represent true feelings of love that one has for the other. Second, it may have been caused by situational or environmental influences (e.g., being drunk, being pressured to say it). Third, it may represent ulterior motives, such as an attempt to force commitment or instigate sexual involvement. Fourth, it may be an expression of comfort or support rather than romantic love. Finally, it may have been said out of confusion over the type of emotion being experienced.

Less studied has been the making of attributions for the communication of affection in nonromantic relationships. However, it may be in platonic relationships that such attributions are most important, given that the romantic connotations of affectionate behavior can have serious implications for the status of platonic relationships. In this study, we focused on platonic friendships between young adults and examined the types of attributions offered for affectionate expressions (verbal, nonverbal, or both). We advance specific predictions regarding the likelihood of attributions being made, the types of attributions to be expected, and the association between attribution types and other perceptual judgments of the givers of affection.

Hypotheses and Research Question

In this study, we focused on attributions for unexpected changes in affectionate involvement within adult platonic friendships. Participants engaged in

two conversations in a laboratory setting. In the second conversation, a confederate was induced either to greatly increase or greatly decrease the extent to which he or she was communicating affection to the other. Naive recipients of the manipulation were subsequently asked if they noticed any unusual changes in their partners' behaviors, and if so, they were asked to provide attributions for those behaviors.

Among the most common findings in attribution research is that causal attributions are more likely to be made for negative than positive behaviors (Camper et al., 1988; Jacobson, Waldron, & Moore, 1980; Manusov et al., 1997; Wong & Weiner, 1981). Particularly in relational interaction, negative behaviors may stand out more because of their potentially face-threatening implications. Thus, with respect to unexpected changes in affectionate involvement, our first hypothesis was that all participants are more likely to make attributions for negative than positive behaviors.

Attributions for observed behaviors tend to fall along a continuum between those that are situational (caused by factors external to, and not under the control of, the actor) and those that are dispositional (caused by factors internal to, and largely under the control of, the actor). Several studies have documented a systematic tendency among attribution makers to favor dispositional attributions—that is, to assume that observed behaviors reflect the disposition of the actor (Jones, 1979; Ross, 1977). This bias has been termed the *fundamental attribution error*, and it suggests that internal, controllable attributions should be more common than external, uncontrollable attributions.

There is reason to believe, however, that the opposite pattern may be true with affectionate behaviors in platonic relationships. Unexpected decreases in affectionate involvement can signal decreased interest in or value for the recipient. As a face-preserving tactic, therefore, the recipient may be more strongly motivated to find external (situational, unstable, uncontrollable) attributions to explain away the decreased involvement (see Shimanoff, 1985). We may expect the same attributional pattern for unexpected increases in affection as well, although for a different reason. One of the risks associated with expressing affection in nonromantic relationships is the possibility that the expression will be interpreted as a romantic sentiment; in opposite-sex pairs this invites questions about the nature of the relationship, and in same-sex pairs it may engender suspicions of homosexuality (Floyd & Morman, 1997; Rabinowitz, 1991). An attribution that the increased affection is dispositional, stable, and within the control of the communicator would therefore obligate the recipient to pay attention to these possibilities and their relational implications, whereas more external attributions would not. This reasoning led us to our second hypothesis, which is that regardless of the valence of the behavior, attributions for unexpected changes in affectionate behavior are more likely to be situational, uncontrollable, and unstable than dispositional, controllable, and stable.

Several studies have identified links between the quality of a relationship

and the tendency to make attributions (see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990, for a review). The common finding is that those in more intimate or satisfying relationships are more likely than those in less intimate or less satisfying relationships to make relationship-maintaining attributions for partners' behaviors. If the prediction made in Hypothesis 2 is supported, and attributions are more likely to be external and uncontrollable than internal and controllable, it is probable that the intimacy level of the relationship moderates this tendency. Specifically, we predicted that intimacy is positively associated with the likelihood of making external, uncontrollable attributions, because these are likely to be the least disruptive to the relationship. Thus, for our third hypothesis, we predicted that the level of intimacy moderates the types of attributions made, so that friends making external, uncontrollable attributions for changes in affectionate behavior are more intimate than those making internal, controllable attributions.

Most research on attribution making for communicative behaviors has addressed the likelihood of making particular types of attributions or the influence of specific moderator variables, such as relational quality. Less often addressed, however, has been the extent to which attributions covary with other types of perceptual judgments of behavior. It is well established that the likelihood of making attributions increases when behavior is less expected; however, does the expectedness of the behavior influence the type of attribution that is made?

Likewise, we wondered whether one's attributions would depend on judgments made about the personal attributes of the communicators themselves. Specifically, we wanted to see whether different attributions would be made for the behaviors of communicators judged to be particularly credible or attractive than for those lacking in credibility or attractiveness. These personal attributes have repeatedly been shown to influence other cognitive assessments of unexpected behavior (Floyd & Voloudakis, 1997). These issues were addressed in the following research question: How are attribution types associated with judgments of behavioral expectedness and evaluation and of the communicator's personal attributes?

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 80$) were 40 men and 40 women who made up 40 dyads of adult platonic friends. At least one person in each dyad was recruited from an introductory communication course at the University of Arizona. Ages ranged from 18 to 44 years ($M = 20.36$, $SD = 2.92$). The participants were recruited for a "study of how close friends talk to each other about their friendship." The dyads were part of an experimental procedure on the cognitive and behavioral effects of expectancy violating affectionate behavior reported in Floyd and Voloudakis (1997), in which portions of the current method are also reported.

Each participant was asked to select one friend to bring with him or her to the study; half were instructed to bring a same-sex friend and half were instructed to bring an opposite-sex friend. In all cases, the participants were asked to select someone whom they considered a close friend, rather than simply an acquaintance, and to choose someone to whom they were not related and with whom they had not had a romantic relationship. There were 20 dyads of same-sex friends (10 each of male–male and female–female pairs) and 20 dyads of opposite-sex friends (10 with a female confederate and 10 with a male confederate) in the study.

Procedure

Upon arrival at the communication laboratory, the participants were told that they would be engaging in two conversations regarding their thoughts and feelings about their friendship with each other and that the conversations would be videotaped from behind a one-way window. After receiving the participants' consent, we tossed a coin to determine the assignment to the confederate (C) and naive participant (P) roles in the dyad. Couples were then separated to complete preinteraction measures of relational intimacy and general rewardingness. The separation served no experimental purpose other than to induce the expectation that the couples would be separated again later.

Following completion of the preinteraction measures, each couple was seated together in the data collection area of the lab, a converted living room with comfortable swivel chairs and a coffee table. They were asked to engage in the first of two conversations about their relationship. Two topics of conversation taken from a game designed to promote dyadic disclosure were provided as a means of guiding the conversation; a total of four topics (for two conversations) were used in the study, and their order of administration was counterbalanced across dyads. The questions were "What is something you really like about your relationship?" "How would you describe what your relationship with each other is like to someone else?" "When do you feel closest to each other?" and "Discuss one of your earliest memories of each other." The participants were encouraged to use the topics to generate conversation but to allow the conversation to proceed as naturally as possible. As there were as yet no instructions given involving affectionate behavior, this premanipulation conversation provided a baseline level of affectionate involvement.

At the conclusion of the first conversation, the couples were again separated, ostensibly to answer some questions about their interaction. P remained in the living room area to complete postinteraction measures of expectedness, evaluation, and relational messages. C was ushered into a back room to receive the experimental induction. C first completed a measure of how affectionate he or she was during the initial interaction, which included marking an X on a 7-interval bipolar scale from low to high affection level. C was then induced either to

greatly increase or greatly decrease affectionate involvement during the second interaction.

Following the induction, the couples were reunited in the living room area for the second interaction, instructions for which were identical to the first. Two new topics of conversation were provided. Unknown to either participant, the video camera behind the one-way window began taping again as soon as C reentered the room, in order to capture all postmanipulation behavior directed toward P even before the second conversation began. At the end of the second interaction, the couples were again separated. P completed postinteraction measures of expectedness, evaluation, relational messages, and attributions, and C completed a measure of how affectionate he or she was during the second conversation. Both participants were then debriefed and excused.

Experimental Manipulation

Those in the high affection condition were asked to increase the extent to which they communicated a sense of closeness, liking, affection, and appreciation toward P using whatever behaviors would be interpreted by P as having these meanings. We were careful to use words such as "closeness," "liking," "involvement," and "appreciation" in addition to "affection" when explaining the desired manipulation. Because "affection" carries romantic connotations, and these were nonromantic relationships, we wanted to assure confederates that we were not asking them to behave romantically toward their partners. Those in the low affection condition were asked to decrease their affectionate involvement in the second interaction and to communicate messages of distance, disinterest, and coldness toward P, again using whatever behaviors would be interpreted as such by P.

There were several options available for creating an appropriate induction. Some studies of communication expectancies have instructed confederates to manipulate specific behaviors, such as particular forms of touch (Burgoon, Walther, & Baesler, 1992). Others have induced multicue manipulations, wherein confederates are instructed to increase or decrease multiple designated behaviors (Guerrero & Burgoon, 1996). In this study, we elected to follow the method of Palmer and Simmons (1995) and instructed confederates to change the level at which they were communicating messages of affectionate involvement (affection, closeness, liking, affiliation). We also decided not to instruct them in the manipulation of any specific behaviors to do this. Given the range of behaviors relational partners use to communicate affection (Floyd & Morman, in press), we decided to allow confederates to make their own decisions about which specific behaviors to change. We felt this approach offered the greatest ecological validity, increasing the chances that the changed behaviors would in fact communicate changed levels of affection to the naive participants.

Those in the high affection condition were given the following instructions:

People have a number of different ways in which they communicate messages of liking, closeness, or affection for others, and we all have certain expectations about the ways in which these things should be communicated. Part of what we're interested in in this study is how people react when someone communicates affectionate messages in ways that are unexpected. In this next conversation, we will be asking you to increase the extent to which you are communicating messages of affection or appreciation for your friend. You can change whatever behaviors you choose in order to do this; think of the types of behaviors you think will communicate this message to your friend. We want you to change your behavior enough that you think your friend is going to notice a difference, relative to the first conversation, but not so much that you think it will be blatantly obvious that we asked you to do this. We would like you to start increasing your level of affection from the time you re-enter the room and to maintain the change throughout the conversation.

Those in the low affection condition were given the same induction, except that they were told to decrease the extent to which affectionate messages were being communicated. As a means of helping C to conceptualize the desired change, C was referred to the 7-interval scale on which he or she marked an X. Those in the high affection condition were asked to conceive of the behavior(s) that would have caused their X to be two intervals higher than it was; those in the low affection condition were asked to behave as they would if they wanted their mark to be two notches lower than it was. In both conditions, C was instructed to begin acting differently toward P from the time they were reunited and to maintain the manipulation throughout the second conversation.

Measures

Preinteraction *relational intimacy* was measured with the Intimate Friendship Scale (Sharabany, 1974, 1994). The scale consists of 32 items assessing frankness/spontaneity, sensitivity/knowing, attachment, exclusiveness, giving/sharing, imposition, common activities, and trust/loyalty. Sample items include "I feel free to talk to this person about anything," "I like this person," and "I can use this person's things without asking permission." Scores fell in a theoretic range of 8 to 56 ($\alpha = .96$).

The confederate's postinteraction self-reported *affection level* (measured to check the manipulation) was assessed with four 7-point Likert-type items taken from the Affection subscale of the Role Behavior Test (Foa & Foa, 1974). Items were "I tried to do things that he or she would like," "I ignored my partner's feelings and showed that I didn't like him or her" (reversed), "I showed trust in my partner," and "I tried to let my partner know that I can't stand him or her" (reversed) ($\alpha = .93$).

The participant's postinteraction measure of *expectedness and evaluation* of the confederate's behavior was assessed with eight 7-point Likert-type items developed by Burgoon, Newton, Walther, and Baesler (1989). Four items each assessed how expected the confederate's behavior was ($\alpha = .75$) and how posi-

tively the behavior was evaluated ($\alpha = .90$). Expectedness items included "My partner behaved in an unusual way" (reversed), "My partner engaged in normal conversational behavior," "My partner behaved the way you would expect most people to behave," and "My partner acted in an appropriate manner during our conversation." Evaluation items were "My partner acted like someone that most people would like to interact with," "My partner behaved in a way that was pleasing to me," "My partner behaved in an undesirable fashion" (reversed), and "My partner made the interaction enjoyable for me."

The *perceived level of confederate's immediacy* (measured to check the manipulation) was assessed using the Immediacy subscale from the factor-based Relational Communication Scale (Burgoon & Hale, 1987). Items included "My partner was intensely involved in our conversation," "My partner did not want a deeper relationship between us" (reversed), "My partner created a sense of distance between us" (reversed), "My partner found the conversation stimulating," "My partner communicated coldness rather than warmth" (reversed), and "My partner acted bored by our conversation" (reversed) ($\alpha = .85$).

To address the research question, we used four measures that assessed the participants' judgments of the confederates' personal attributes. *Target credibility* was assessed with twelve 7-point bipolar adjective scales developed by McCroskey and Young (1981). Six items each are designed to measure two separate aspects of credibility: competence ($\alpha = .79$) and character ($\alpha = .86$). Competence items were believable-unbelievable, competent-incompetent, informed-uninformed, logical-illogical, qualified-unqualified, and intelligent-unintelligent. Character items were honest-dishonest, cooperative-uncooperative, kind-cruel, responsible-irresponsible, nice-awful, and good-bad. Scores for each subscale fall in a theoretic range of 1 to 7.

Attraction was measured with eight 7-point Likert-type items developed by McCroskey and McCain (1974). Four items each measure social attractiveness ($\alpha = .88$) and task attractiveness ($\alpha = .79$). Social attraction items included "It would be difficult to meet and talk with my partner" (reversed), "We could never establish a very personal relationship with each other" (reversed), "I would like to have a friendly chat with him/her," and "I think this person could be a good friend of mine." Task attraction items included "I couldn't get anything accomplished with my partner" (reversed), "If I wanted to get things done, I could probably depend on him/her," "I have confidence in this person's ability to get a job done," and "I think he/she would be a poor problem solver" (reversed). Both scores have a theoretic range of 1 to 7.

Attributions for confederate's behavior was assessed using an instrument adapted from Manusov et al. (1997). Participants were told that the experimenters wanted to be sure they had recorded a relatively normal interaction between P and C, and so they wanted to know if there were any behaviors that stood out to P as abnormal or out of the ordinary. They were then asked to respond to a series of yes-no and open-ended questions. To be sure that the

behaviors noticed were consistent with the manipulated behaviors and that they were the cues that instigated the attributions, we first asked the participants, "Did any of your partner's behaviors stand out to you during the videotaping? If yes, please describe the behaviors you noticed and approximately when you noticed them."

If participants answered yes to the first question, they were asked to respond to two additional open-ended questions: How would you explain your partner's behavior(s); and what did the behavior(s) mean to you; what was communicated? Open-ended questions were used instead of attribution scales because the former are more likely to be tied to the specific behaviors investigated in the study rather than to be a result of general feelings toward a partner (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990).

Coding of Attribution Responses

Three trained coders who were blind to the hypotheses assessed the questionnaires for evidence of attribution making. First, coders reviewed Ps' questionnaires for the valence of the behaviors noticed and to assess whether the behaviors were consistent with the manipulations. If they were, the coders reviewed the questions about the meaning and explanation of Cs' behaviors to extract attributional statements (anything that indicated a cause of and/or responsibility for the behaviors).

When an attributional statement was evident, coders wrote it down and judged it on six 7-point scales corresponding to the causal and responsibility dimensions used in previous attribution research (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994; Manusov, 1990; Manusov et al., 1997; Weiner, 1985). The causal dimensions were *external* (1) to *internal* (7), *unstable* (1) to *stable* (7), and *specific* (1) to *global* (7). The responsibility dimensions were *uncontrollable* (1) to *controllable* (7), *unintentional* (1) to *intentional* (7), and *not personally responsible* (1) to *personally responsible* (7). Overall scores for causality and responsibility reflect the aggregate of the three items in each; coefficient alphas were .81 for causality and .97 for responsibility.

Participants could therefore have no scores (if the behaviors noticed were inconsistent with the manipulation, if they did not notice the cues, or if they did not provide attributions for the behaviors), or they could have a set of scores reflecting attributions for the manipulation-consistent behaviors noticed.

Coders received approximately 4 hr of individual and collective training. Each coder rated all of the dyads. Interrater reliabilities, based on Ebel's intraclass correlation (Guilford, 1954), were .61 for causality and .83 for responsibility. In each case, the reliability for a particular pair of coders exceeded the reliability for all three coders. Therefore, aggregates were computed on each dimension from the two coders whose scores provided the highest reliability.

Results

Manipulation Checks

First, confederates' self-reports of their affection level during each conversation were compared by manipulation. A significant Manipulation \times Time interaction emerged, $F(1, 38) = 151.51, p < .001, \eta^2 = .80$. Confederates in the high affection condition reported a significant increase in affectionate behavior from the baseline interaction ($M = 5.90, SD = .65$) to the postmanipulation interaction ($M = 6.59, SD = .54$), $t(19) = -5.03, p < .001$. Likewise, those in the low affection condition reported a significant decrease in affectionate behavior from the baseline interaction ($M = 5.88, SD = .83$) to the postmanipulation interaction ($M = 3.48, SD = .82$), $t(19) = 11.41, p < .001$.

Participants' scores on the expectedness of Cs' behaviors during each conversation were compared. A significant decrease in expectedness from the baseline to the postmanipulation interaction would indicate success for both manipulations. As anticipated, expectedness showed a significant decrease from the baseline ($M = 5.41, SD = 1.32$) to the postmanipulation interaction ($M = 4.96, SD = 1.48$), $t(39) = 1.69, p < .05$.

An experimental assistant blind to the manipulation condition watched both interactions from behind the one-way window and indicated which condition (high or low affection) had been enacted. This coding showed 92% accuracy with the induced condition.

A significant Manipulation \times Time interaction emerged for naive participants' assessments of confederates' immediacy, $F(1, 32) = 8.00, p = .008, \eta^2 = .20$. Naive participants in the low affection condition saw confederates as significantly less immediate at Time 2 than at Time 1, $t(19) = 2.48, p = .01$. Those in the high affection condition showed a trend toward greater immediacy at Time 2 than at Time 1, $t(19) = -1.42, p = .08$.

Finally, to ensure that increases in affectionate behavior would represent positive behavior and decreases would be judged as negative, we compared evaluation scores by time for each manipulation condition. The univariate Manipulation \times Time interaction was significant, $F(1, 32) = 13.45, p = .001, \eta^2 = .30$. As expected, scores for those in the high affection condition showed a significant increase from Time 1/baseline ($M = 5.56, SD = 1.24$) to Time 2/manipulation ($M = 5.89, SD = 0.97$), $t(19) = -1.93, p = .04$. Mean scores for those in the low affection condition showed the hypothesized decrease from Time 1 ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.19$) to Time 2 ($M = 4.48, SD = 1.77$), $t(19) = 3.27, p = .002$.

Hypotheses

Our first hypothesis stated that participants would be more likely to make attributions for negative than positive behaviors. Attributions were provided in

only 18 of the 40 dyads in the study. Of these, 5 were for positive behaviors and 13 were for negative behaviors. This difference is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, 18) = 3.56, p = .05$. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

The second prediction was that, regardless of the valence of the behavior, attributions for changes in affectionate behavior would more often be external, unstable, and uncontrollable than internal, stable, and controllable. To test the prediction, we split the scores for the causal and responsibility dimensions at their theoretic median of 4, creating two levels of each variable. Those with scores lower than 4 on each scale were coded as a 1, indicating that the attributions were external, unstable, specific, uncontrollable, unintentional, and not responsible. Those with scores exceeding 4 on each scale were coded as a 2, which indicated attributions that were internal, stable, global, controllable, intentional, and responsible. The median split produced groups for each variable whose mean scores differed significantly from each other, $t(16) = -4.30, p < .001$, for the two levels of causality, and $t(16) = -5.73, p < .001$, for the two levels of responsibility.

Chi-square tests were used to compare the number of participants whose attributions were at each level on both variables. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, 14 participants' attributions were in the low (situational) group on causality and 4 were in the high (dispositional) group; this distribution differs significantly from the expected distribution, $\chi^2(1, 18) = 5.56, p = .02$. Likewise, 13 attributions were in the low (uncontrollable) group on responsibility and 5 were in the high (controllable) group; this distribution also differs significantly from the expected, $\chi^2(1, 18) = 3.56, p = .05$. Our second hypothesis was supported.

Our third hypothesis was a prediction that relational intimacy would moderate the likelihood of making situational, uncontrollable attributions for changes in affectionate behavior. Specifically, we hypothesized that friends making external and uncontrollable attributions for changes in affection would be more intimate than those making dispositional and controllable attributions. Consistent with the prediction, those making situational attributions reported higher relational intimacy ($M = 5.25, SD = .86$) than those making dispositional attributions ($M = 3.99, SD = 1.25$), $t(16) = 2.34, p = .02$. Contrary to the prediction, however, intimacy scores for those making uncontrollable attributions ($M = 5.15, SD = 1.13$) did not significantly differ from scores for those making controllable attributions ($M = 4.51, SD = .78$), $t(16) = 1.15, p > .05$. Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

Research Question

The research question asked how the types of attributions Ps made would be associated with their other judgments of Cs' behaviors. To address the question, we regressed scores on causality and responsibility in a stepwise procedure on Ps' judgments of the evaluation and expectedness of Cs' behaviors, and on Ps' assessments of Cs' competence, character, social attractiveness, and task attractiveness.

Ps' judgments of Cs' character ($b = -3.39$, $\beta = -.61$, $t = -3.31$) and Ps' evaluation of Cs' behavior ($b = -.44$, $\beta = -.45$, $t = -2.44$) significantly predicted the causality dimension of Ps' attributions (adjusted $R^2 = .43$). The sign of the t test associated with each beta indicates that more positive assessments of Cs' character and behavior translated into attributions that were external, unstable, and specific.

Likewise, character ($b = -4.47$, $\beta = -.65$, $t = -3.86$) and then evaluation ($b = -.62$, $\beta = -.52$, $t = -3.09$) predicted the responsibility dimension of Ps' attributions (adjusted $R^2 = .53$). As with causality, more positive assessments of Cs' character and behavior translated into attributions that were uncontrollable, unintentional, and not responsible.

Discussion

To increase our chances of eliciting attributions, we intentionally created situations in which the change in affectionate behavior was unexpected. Theories such as that for expectancy violations posit that expectancy violations cause increased cognitive processing on the part of the receiver, including attempts to formulate attributions for the behavior. Participants reported that the manipulated behaviors were significantly less expected than the baseline behaviors; 18 of the 40 naive participants offered attributions for their partners' manipulated behaviors.

As expected, participants more often made attributions for decreases in affection than for increases in affection. This result is in agreement with previous research reporting that attributions are more likely for negative than positive behavior, a tendency that may reflect the greater face threat that often accompanies negative behavior. In the present study, for example, decreases in affection likely entailed potential face threats that increases in affection did not (e.g., a decrease in affection can communicate lack of interest in the receiver). Therefore, it may be more important for receivers to formulate attributions for negative behaviors as a way to manage these potential face threats.

On a related note, we predicted that all attributions, regardless of the valence of the behavior, would more often be external and uncontrollable than internal and controllable. We reasoned that those in the decreased affection condition would most often make external and uncontrollable attributions as a way of mitigating the face threats associated with the decreased affection. Likewise, we expected those in the increased affection condition to make external and uncontrollable attributions as a way of avoiding the relational implications (and potential romantic overtones) that might be associated with sincere increases in affection. This prediction was supported.

This finding is notable because it contradicts the prediction of the fundamental attribution error, which posits that attributions are more likely to be internal (dispositional) than external (situational). Our reasoning in predicting the

opposite pattern considers the potential implications the attribution has for the participants' relationships. That is, we submit that if the behavior has direct implications for the receiver and/or the receiver's relationship to the giver, then the attributions made for the behavior also have direct implications for the receiver or the relationship. Certain attributions (e.g., internal attributions for increased affection) may force receivers to attend to the relational implications of the behavior, whereas other attributions (e.g., external attributions for increased affection) would not. The potential of one's own vested interest in the situation to affect his or her attributions should certainly be investigated further, perhaps using experimental procedures to manipulate not only the behavior but also the extent to which it has implications for receivers.

We were aware from previous studies of the potential for relational quality to moderate the influence of behavior on attributions. Based on previous findings, we predicted that friendships in which changes in affection were attributed to external, uncontrollable causes would be more intimate than those in which changes in affection were given internal, controllable attributions. This prediction followed the reasoning behind Hypothesis 2, that external, uncontrollable attributions would be preferred over internal, controllable attributions; if that is true, then more intimate relationships should be more likely to make external, uncontrollable attributions.

The prediction was supported for the causality dimension, with those making external attributions reporting higher intimacy than those making internal attributions. The prediction was not supported for the responsibility dimension, although the mean difference was in the expected direction. These findings underscore the tendency for close, intimate relationships to make more relationship-maintaining attributions than those that are less close or less intimate.

Finally, we extended previous research by looking at the association between attributions and receivers' other perceptual judgments of senders and their behavior. Existing research has examined the variables influencing the likelihood of making particular types of attributions, but we were not aware of any published research investigating how the types of attributions made for behavior are associated with other cognitive assessments. To address this issue, we regressed the causal and responsibility dimensions on receivers' judgments of the expectedness and evaluation of confederates' behavior and on receivers' judgments of confederates' competence, character, social attractiveness, and task attractiveness.

For both causality and responsibility, receivers' evaluation of confederates' behavior and receivers' judgments of confederates' character were the significant predictors. Specifically, more positive assessments of receivers' behavior and character predicted attributions that were external and uncontrollable. This result follows the pattern predicted in Hypotheses 2 and 3 that external, uncontrollable attributions were the preferred choices for changes in affectionate behavior. Just as these types of attributions were associated with greater relational intimacy between confederate and participant, they were also associated with more posi-

tive judgments of confederates' behaviors and with more positive assessments of confederates' credibility.

Considered in concert, these findings have at least two important implications for attribution researchers and consumers of their work. First, they provide a reason to rethink the nature of the fundamental attribution error. The prevailing pattern in the present study was clearly one of making situational attributions rather than dispositional ones. We submit that because the behavior had direct implications for receivers and their relationships with givers, the receivers opted for the most relationship-maintaining attributions available to them, which in this case appeared to be those that were external and uncontrollable. Of course, this explanation is speculative on our part; however, the empirical support it received in the present study at least merits further experimental examination.

Second, these findings build on and extend previous research by examining the associations between attributions and other perceptual judgments about givers of affection and their behavior. In this case, it was revealed that attribution types were significantly predicted by how positively givers' behaviors were evaluated and by how positive their character was judged to be. Future research efforts might extend this line of inquiry further by examining patterns of covariation between attribution types and behavioral responses to givers' behavior, for a more complete picture of how attributions influence, and are influenced by, other characteristics of an interaction.

Two limitations of the research should qualify an interpretation of these results. First, although the experimental procedure included a sample size of 40 dyads, only 18 dyads were involved in the analyses because participants in the remaining dyads offered no attributions for confederates' behaviors. This small sample size may have reduced statistical power and masked associations between attributions and other variables that might emerge as significant with a larger sample. However, despite the small sample, all of the hypothesized relationships received support, indicating that statistical strength for these predictions would be even greater with a larger sample. Therefore, although the sample size may have limited some of our findings, it attests to the strength of those that did emerge.

Second, the sample consisted predominantly of undergraduate students in their early 20s. Some would suggest that college-aged students are ideal for the study of friendship, given the heightened importance many people place on friendship at that stage in life (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). However, examining samples of different age groups may indicate whether age plays a role in how relational behavior is interpreted and to what it is attributed.

The results of this study support previous findings on attribution making by applying it to the context of affectionate communication and provide an important first look at how attribution types co-vary with other perceptual judgments and factors that may influence the direction of the fundamental attribution error. Future research on these issues is needed to flesh out further the influences of

behavior valence, relational investment, evaluation, expectedness, and judgments of givers' attributes on the types of attributions made for interpersonal behavior.

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