SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY, 2007, **35**(1), 135-142

DOI 10.2224/sbp.2007.35.1.135

THE ANTECEDENTS OF HELP GIVING IN CHINESE CULTURE: ATTRIBUTION, JUDGMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY, EXPECTATION CHANGE AND THE REACTION OF AFFECT

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The quantitative relationships among attributional locus, stability, controllability, judgment of responsibility, affect response and help giving were detected. Participants were 219 employees and managers, and the structural equation model that reflected the relationships among these variables was tested. The findings suggested that causal locus and controllability linked with help giving are mediated by judgment of responsibility and subsequent affect response and expectation change. Stability attribution indirectly correlated with help giving by linking with expectation. Attributional dimensions, judgment of responsibility, expectation change and the reactions of affect were the antecedent variables of help giving. Findings are discussed in terms of related Chinese cultural and social values.

Keywords: causal attribution, judgment of responsibility, help giving, structural equation model.

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The authors acknowledge support received from the National Science Foundation of China (No.70371053) and would like to thank Professor Bernard Weiner and the members of the attribution interest group in UCLA for their great suggestions about this research.
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Weiner (2000) extended the intrapersonal attribution theory to include interpersonal attribution and social motivation, or other-directed attribution. This extension of attributional theory has facilitated understanding of many aspects of social life, social justice, and economic benefits (Farwell, 2000). Inference of responsibility in the fields of law and management has determined the reactions related with aggressive behavior, help giving, AIDS, and depression (Dresler-Hawke, 2005; Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004).

Attributional theory suggested that different attribution would elicit different responsibility reference. Causal controllability has a close relationship with judgment of responsibility. Weiner concluded that there was a link between controllability and responsibility (See Weiner, 1995, p. 11).

Judgment of responsibility is often concerned with affective and behavioral responses. Weiner's theory showed that responsibility for a negative outcome gave rise to anger; lack of responsibility for a negative achievement outcome tended to elicit sympathy. These affect responses, in turn, elicited antisocial behavior or prosocial responses, such as reprimand, blame, or helping behavior (See Weiner, 1995).

Weiner suggested that causal controllability was the antecedent of responsibility (see Weiner 2000), that is: event → causal controllability → judgment of responsibility → affect (anger or sympathy) → behavior reaction (such as help giving).

However, this is only a theoretical hypothesis, it has not been fully tested. In the previous research, causal locus and stability were seldom mentioned, and their functions in help giving were still unknown. This research tested the hypothesis about the process of judgment of responsibility and the relationship between interpersonal attribution of responsibility and help giving in Chinese culture. Additionally, a model was proposed that reflected the relationships among attributional dimensions (including locus, stability and controllability), judgment of responsibility, affect responses (anger and sympathy), expectation change and help giving, that was: causal locus, controllability and stability elicited responsibility judgment, affect response (anger and sympathy), and expectation change, then they elicited help giving.

METHOD

Participants

There were two groups of participants (in total, 219). Group one was managers (including leaders from corporations, government officers and managers from university, n = 127, 75 males, 52 females). Group two was employees and staff from those three fields (n = 92, 34 males, 58 females). Their ages were between

25 and 46 (M = 31.26, SD = 5.23). They all had more than two years' working experience.

Scenarios

Stimulus scenarios were divided into two situations according to attributional dimensions. One was the situation of internal-controllable causes in which people needed help; the other was the situation of external-uncontrollable reasons that gave rise to the need of help.

> ***Situation one:*** There was a salesman for an insurance company who made no effort to sell door-to-door, but waited for customers to come to him. He was fired at last for failing to finish the task.
>
> ***Situation two:*** There was a salesman for an insurance company who worked hard and was conscientious, but since the task he was assigned was too difficult, he couldn't do what was wanted of him. He was fired at last for failing to finish the task.

Measures

A 7-point Likert rating scale evaluated variables. There were 8 items in total. Three causal dimensions were assessed: causal locus that located the cause of the event within the person or the event; controllability that differentiated causes that could be volitionally altered or causes that could not; and stability that distinguished between causes that varied over time or not. The participants were asked to what extent the cause of the actor's failure was something that reflected an internal, controllable and stable reason (e.g. 7 = *internal reason*, 1 = *external reason*). Then, five composite variables were created to assess participants' affect responses to the actor (including anger and sympathy, whether the actor would be expected to fail again, the actor's behavioral responsibility toward the target, and help giving to the actor).

Procedure

Firstly, participants were told that they could give their judgment anonymously. Secondly, in the two situations the reasons for failure were different, one was "lack of effort", the other was "task difficulty". Thirdly, the last five items were presented randomly in the scales. Finally, participants were randomly assigned to only one of these two situations.

RESULTS

Manipulation Effect Checks and the Trends of the Data

To check the manipulation effects of situations and understand the principles

causing the trends of some dependent variables, the mean values and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF EVERY VARIABLES IN TWO SITUATIONS

	Situation 1 (*N*=103)		Situation 2 (*N*=116)		*T* Value
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Locus	6.388	1.105	2.319	1.466	22.967**
Stability	4.932	2.120	2.802	1.939	7.765**
Controllability	6.350	1.126	3.302	1.983	13.748**
Anger	5.738	1.495	2.043	1.423	18.730**
Sympathy	2.058	1.334	6.431	0.867	-29.058**
Expectation	5.214	1.758	3.069	1.661	9.277**
Help	3.058	1.539	6.216	1.086	-17.687**
Responsibility	6.359	0.850	2.776	1.402	22.515**

Note: ** $p < .01$.

These data indicate that the manipulation effects of the variables were successful, their values were as predicted. The mean values of locus, stability and controllability in situation 1 were 6.388, 4.932, 6.350, respectively, indicating that participants commonly thought that this was an internal-controllable-stable situation; however, in situation 2 their values were 2.319, 2.802, 3.302, respectively, indicating that it tended to be an external-uncontrollable-unstable situation. This was consistent with the intention of our manipulation. *T*-test showed: t (217) = 22.967, 7.765, 13.748, $ps < .001$; there was a significant difference between them. These results confirmed that the manipulation effects of situations were consistent with our prediction.

Correspondingly with the manipulation, the other dependent variables changed as well, such as to the variables of anger, sympathy, expectation, responsibility, and help giving. Their t values respectively were ts (217) = 18.730, -29.058, 9.277, 22.515, -17.687, $ps < .001$. All of the variables in the two situations were significantly different respectively. Situation 1 elicited high anger - low sympathy - high expectation - high responsibility - low help; conversely, situation 2 elicited low anger - high sympathy - low expectation - low responsibility - high help. These changes were consistent with our manipulation and prediction as a whole, and fitted Weiner's (2000) theoretical hypothesis as well.

Testing by participants' gender and identity (employee and manager) showed that there were neither main effects nor interacted effects; that is to say, participants' understanding of every situations was identical, whether by gender or by identity.

To find the relationships among these variables, we carried out correlation analysis, and combined the data for situation 1 and 2. All of the variables had significant correlation ($ps < .01$) with the others. And since the two situations elicited very different attribution and subsequent reactions, most of the correlation efficiencies (from 0.3145 to 0.8398) were very high. From these tendencies of change, we could see that the relationships among these variables were consistent with our basic hypothesis.

To test and uncover the quantitative relationships among these variables, structural equation analysis was used to conform the related theoretical model. Here, according to attributional theory and the related achievements, we set up the theoretical model first, then tested the model by Peter Bentler's structural equation statistical program (EQS6.0).

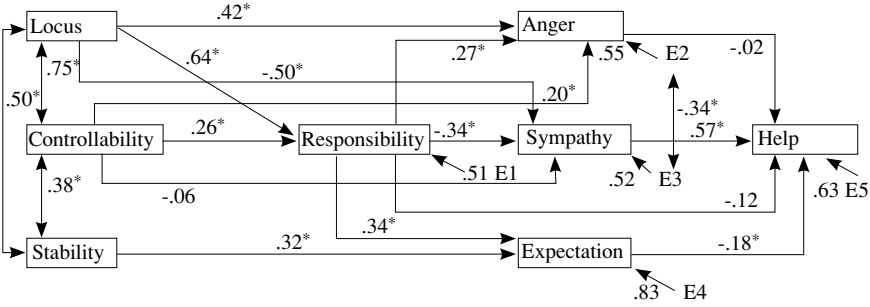

Figure 1: Structural equations model
Note: * $p < .05$.

The standard parameters were as seen in Figure 2, and the fitness indexes showed a very good level of fit of the model to the data: fitness index χ^2 (10) =15.60, $p = .11 > .05$. This showed that the theoretical hypothesis fitted well with the data (no difference) NFI (Normed Fit Index) =.989, NNFI (Non-Normed Fit Index) = .988, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = .996, RMSEA (Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation) = .05 (90% confidence interval is [.000, .097]). These indexes showed that the theoretical model fitted perfectly with the data.

The findings were consistent with our theoretical predictions: Firstly, locus and controllability had direct contributions to judgment of responsibility (βs = .64, .26), anger (βs = .42, .20) and sympathy (βs = -.50, -.06); secondly, locus and controllability had indirect links with help giving by medial responsibility, sympathy and expectation (βs = -.12, .57, -.18); thirdly, stability had direct relations with expectation ($\beta = .32$).

At the same time, we found that anger and sympathy had an interrelationship, the correlation between their errors was ($r = -.34$), and the correlations between

locus and controllability, locus and stability, controllability and stability respectively were: *r*s = .75, .50, .38.

DISCUSSION

Firstly, the theoretical model of interpersonal attribution and help giving was tested by SEM, and it was found that, on a whole, the model fitted the data well across situations. Causal attributions, responsibility, affect responses and expectation changes could serve as the antecedents of help giving – that is, causal dimensions (locus, controllability and stability)→ judgment of responsibility→ affect responses (anger and sympathy) and expectation change→ help giving.

Secondly, these results further supported our belief that causal locus and stability also were important dimensions that could influence help giving as well as controllability. Locus had direct and indirect links (mediated by judgment of responsibility and affect responses) to help giving, and in Chinese culture, people usually assigned behavior responsibility according to the causal locus. These findings had universality across situations in Chinese culture (also see Zhang, 2003).

Thirdly, since help giving is an important prosocial behavior, these findings have important significance for our understanding of some parts of people's social life. They told us as " judges" how to weigh the evidence to make inferences about locus, controllability and responsibility, experienced emotion akin to sympathy or anger, and then meted out judgments that entailed either rejection or help.

Finally, although the main findings of this study supported the model of attributional theory as it relates to the judgment of responsibility and help giving, the situations we used to stimulate participants' responses or reactions were artificially manipulated, and participants gave their response by a role-playing method. So, it is necessary to test the hypothesis of judgment of responsibility and help giving in real contexts and other cultures from an attributional perspective in the future.

In conclusion, this research lets us know more clearly the quantitative relationships among attribution, judgment of responsibility for behavior, affect response and help giving in a much wider frame from an attributional perspective compared with earlier studies. The findings could prove useful in understanding under what situations people are more likely to help others, and how the mediating factors, such as responsibility and affects, function in this kind of decision-making process. Of course, some factors relating to culture and social values were potentially influencing the degree of these relationships. In addition, our results could be extended to the understanding of the other management and

social problems that were related with responsibility judgment, such as social justice, punishment, aggression, social relief and the stigmatizing condition.

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