UCLA
UCLA Previously Published Works

Title
The attribution approach to emotion and motivation: History, hypotheses, home runs, headaches/heartaches

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2vn807vq

Journal
Emotion Review, 6(4)

ISSN
1754-0739

Author
Weiner, B

Publication Date
2014-10-27

DOI
10.1177/1754073914534502

Peer reviewed

The Attribution Approach to Emotion and Motivation:

History, Hypotheses, Home Runs, Headaches/Heartaches

Bernard Weiner

University of California, Los Angeles

Correspondence to

Bernard Weiner

University of California, Los Angeles

405 S. Hilgard Ave.

Los Angeles, California 90095-1563

310-825-2750

310-206-5895

Weiner@psych.ucla.edu

ABSTRACT

In this article the history of the attribution approach to emotion and motivation is reviewed. Early motivation theorists incorporated emotion within the pleasure/pain principle but they did not recognize specific emotions. This changed when Atkinson introduced his theory of achievement motivation, which argued that achievement strivings are determined by the anticipated emotions of pride and shame. Attribution theorists then suggested many other emotional reactions to success and failure are determined by the perceived causes of achievement outcomes and the shared characteristics or dimensions of causality. The article then outlines the hypothesized dimensional antecedents of a number of self- and other-directed achievement-related emotions following success (admiration, apprehension, confidence, disliking, envy, gratitude, liking, pride, and surprise) and failure (anger, guilt, helplessness, hope, hopelessness, pity, regret, Schadenfreude, scorn, shame, surprise, and sympathy). Motivational consequences of emotions also are highlighted.

Keywords: attribution, causal beliefs, emotion, helping, motivation

Some of the earliest published studies under the broad heading of experimental psychology were concerned with motivation. Psychologists asked what happens when a lower organism (typically a rat) is deprived of food or water – does the deprived subhuman, as compared to a more sated animal, run faster for food; work harder to get it; persist longer in the face of obstacles; learn more; exhibit a greater willingness to submit to shock or other aversive stimulation to reach the desired goal; and the like. The experimental manipulations of food or water deprivation, and/or variations in the amount or quality of need-appropriate substances when used as rewards, were straightforward, as were measures related to the motivational consequences of these manipulations such as running speed or amount of learning.

On the other hand, the vast majority of research studies regarding emotions were late entries into the field of experimental psychology. Emotions were regarded as too subjective to be studied experimentally; lower organisms did not have the language to report their feelings; and verbal reports of humans were regarded with caution (at best), particularly during the decades of strict behaviorism (about 1920-1940). Thus, two fields that intuitively seem to be linked, motivation and emotion, emerged as separate areas of study.

But this did not mean that motivation psychologists thought their animal subjects do not have feelings, that is, eat without pleasure and endure deprivation without pain. Rather, the pleasure/pain principle – organisms attempt to maximize pleasure and minimize pain - lay at the very center of motivation theory. It was generally accepted that the attainment of rewards, such as food and water, is accompanied by a positive

emotion that might be labeled pleasure or happiness, whereas a negative emotion considered pain or unhappiness is associated with deprivation and shock.

Emotions thus provided a foundation for motivated behavior. Actions of lower organisms were presumed to be guided by anticipated pleasure or pain, or prior pleasure automatically resulted in the repetition of a rewarded action while pain decreased the likelihood of that response. The pleasure/pain principle found support among psychologists concerned with human behavior as well, particularly those adhering to a Freudian view.

In sum, emotion was incorporated in the theories of motivation psychologists as a given, not needing experimental verification or study. Furthermore, it was regarded as functional to pursue pleasure-inducing goals (e.g., food) inasmuch as their attainment increases the likelihood of survival. Thus, hedonism was linked with functionalism, yet another given for the motivated organism.

<div align="center">Moving Toward the Inclusion of other Emotions</div>

Although early motivation psychologists therefore did recognize and accept emotion, it was certainly a restricted and limited view (with some exceptions, such as the work of McDougall). Emotions were classified according to valence – there was the positive emotion of pleasure (happiness) and the negative emotion of pain (unhappiness). Fear and anxiety also were acknowledged but construed as drives in the same manner as hunger and not discussed as emotions. Also implicit was an intensity or magnitude characteristic – one could feel very happy when securing a positive goal or somewhat happy if the reward was of lesser amount or value. But this confined view of emotion

from a motivation perspective was about to undergo change as the experimental study of motivation came to incorporate human participants.

When the laboratory study of motivational processes began to center upon humans, sometimes in the early 1950s, the sources of motivation shifted from the so-called viscerogenic needs (e.g., hunger and thirst) to psychogenic desires (e.g., status and power over others, affiliation, and achievement strivings). The study of achievement became particularly prominent, in part because of its obvious role in the motivational lives of humans and in part because achievement desires could be manipulated in the same manner as hunger and thirst by experimentally inducing task failure (akin to deprivation or nonattainment of a desired food goal) and success (akin to satiety or goal attainment).

Two questions raised in this pursuit were what are the goals of achievement-related behaviors and how can the magnitude or quality of those goals be determined. The goals or attained values of success appear to be numerous: they might include monetary reward, a good grade in school, appeasing one's parents, applause from others, a promotion and increased work responsibilities, and on and on. But for John Atkinson (1957), who formulated an influential theory of achievement motivation, these rewards were considered extrinsic motivations, not intrinsically or inherently tied to achievement striving. According to Atkinson, the incentive value or reward for achievement behavior is not a material good but instead is an affect -- pride in accomplishment. If one succeeds at a task, he reasoned, the intrinsic incentive value of that success is a feeling of pride. Furthermore, the intensity or amount of pride is determined by the subjective difficulty of

the task such that success at a difficult task gives rise to greater pride than does success at an easy task.

Just as hunger needs were associated with pleasure (when fulfilled) or pain (when not satisfied), in a similar manner achievement desires were presumed to be associated with negative as well as positive affect. Atkinson proposed that when failing at a task an individual experiences shame. And in a manner similar to pride, the magnitude of that affect is determined by the difficulty of the task: most shame is felt when there is failure at an easy task, whereas minimal shame is undergone when there is failure at a difficult task.

Achievement striving, Atkinson therefore contended, involves a battle between competing emotional valences. If anticipated pride from success exceeds the anticipated shame given failure, then a task will be approached. On the other hand, greater expected intensity of shame given failure than intensity of pride given success inhibits achievement strivings and promotes withdrawal from achievement settings. Hence, the relative value of anticipated competing emotions determines choice or the direction of behavior. In this manner, Atkinson introduced specific emotions into the field of motivation, substituting pride and shame in the place of pleasure and pain. He also identified an antecedent, task difficulty, which determines the magnitude of these emotional experiences. Once again, hedonism was the foundation of motivated action, but it was determined by very distinctive emotions that may be operative only or primarily in achievement-related contexts.

Given this analysis, one is confronted with the problem of whether the sole or even primary emotions associated with success and failures actually are pride and shame.

It is intuitively apparent that following success one might feel grateful, confident, apprehensive, surprised, and other emotions. In a similar manner, following failure it seems that the primary affective experience could be anger, guilt, hopelessness, helplessness, surprise, and others. To further enrich this emotional plate, emotions also are experienced when witnessing others succeed and fail. In these instances, possible emotions include not only pride following success but also admiration, envy, and others. And given observed failure, the emotional reaction might be shame but also anger, pity, Schadenfreude, sympathy and many more.

 What antecedents, then, give rise to these diverse emotional states, i.e., what are the determinants of affective reactions to success and failure, and what are the motivational consequences or implications of different feelings? Atkinson did not address these topics, never really confronting emotions as opposed to replacing pleasure and pain with pride and shame, but they did become core to an attribution analysis of emotion and motivation, the topic of this article.

<div align="center">Additional History: Attribution Theory</div>

At approximately the same time period that Atkinson published his theory of achievement strivings, Fritz Heider (1958) introduced attribution theory into psychology. This may be a somewhat misleading statement, however, in that "attribution" refers to a set of topics, constructs, ideas, and approaches to psychology rather than an integrated theory.

The core of an attribution analysis is the cause of an event or outcome. This can be simply illustrated when one considers a car not starting. Given that "failure," there is a search for causality represented by a "why" question – Why did the car not start? In

this example, it is typically known that a few causes are dominant – lack of gas, a non-

functioning battery, or something awry with the ignition switch or electrical system. The

car driver then is likely to seek information to determine which of these causal

hypotheses is correct. Examination of the gas gauge to see if it points to empty,

inspection of the battery to discover if there is a loose wire or corrosion, testing whether

the car radio or lights can be activated, and so on provide clues to reach a solution to the

problem.

Let us assume that the gas gauge indeed shows empty. Based on this

information, it is likely to be concluded that the car lacks gas and various options will be

considered that result in adding gas to the tank, after which there will be an attempt to

restart the car. If successful, then the inferred cause of the problem appears to have been

correct. This motivation sequence can be construed as follows:

Event (car not starting) – Causal Information (gas gauge reading) - Causal

inference (lack of gas caused the car not to start) – Motivated action (put gas in

the tank, start the car)

Of course, this is a rather trivial example as compared with the complexity of the

causes of other human events. For example, one might ask why have I (or another

person) failed this exam, been rejected for a date, experienced a divorce, lost a job, and

on and on. These are negative events, just as is the failure of the car to start, which are

more likely to elicit causal search and understanding than are positive outcomes. After

all, a person typically does not ask why DID the car start or why was he or she accepted

for a date! In addition, the causes in these examples are numerous; causal decisions are

complex with uncertain confirmation of proof; and more germane for this article, a great

variety of emotions are engaged. Merely consider the different reactions if one is not accepted for a date because the other person will be away on a trip as opposed to rejection because (you believe) the desired other finds you boring, or was purposefully led to believe something negative about you that is untrue! Cause-emotion relations are at the heart of the attribution approach to the study of affect.

Attribution and emotion

The most basic assumption of an attribution view of emotion is that feelings are determined by thoughts, and specifically by beliefs about causality. This may be considered a subset of the appraisal approach to emotions, but the appraisals are focused on causal beliefs.

A serious difficulty facing an attribution approach to emotion is that there are a huge number of possible attributions for outcomes, far greater than formulated lists of emotions, and these in part differ between achievement settings and motivational domains. For example, the causes of success at basketball such as height, speed, and athletic co-ordination are unlikely to be perceived as causes of success at a math test. Does this mean that the emotions after winning a basketball game are entirely different than those following success at a math quiz? One would not think so! Further, does this also imply that winning a basketball game because of lengthy practices versus attaining a date because of calling early, different causes, give rise to entirely disparate emotions? That also seems unlikely.

Identification of the basic properties, or characteristics, or dimensions that might characterize all causes in part provided a solution to this problem (see Weiner, 1985). In so doing, there was an advance from qualitative to quantitative differences between

causes, thus giving rise to the possibility that disparate causal beliefs elicit the same affective experience because they share one or more properties. That is, rather than ability and effort being regarded as qualitatively distinct, they are now regarded as differing quantitatively on their placement in a causal space. Three causal properties have been definitively uncovered.

Causal locus. The causal characteristic most fully embraced has been called the locus or location of a cause, with causes perceived as residing with or outside of the person. Thus, for example, success at sports because of height, success at math because of numerical aptitude, and being accepted for a date because of a pleasant personality are similar in the sense that all these causes reside with the person. On the other hand, success at sports because the competing team is so poor, success at math because of a good teacher, and being accepted for a date because the other person wants to go to a party all share the causal characteristic of being external to the actor. In sum, phenotypically disparate causes may have, on a genotypic level, common features.

All causes can be characterized on a continuum anchored with internal and external poles. At times, there may be disagreement on how a cause is classified on location. For example, one might succeed at math and believe it was just good luck or chance (external locus) or that she is a lucky person (internal locus). Typically, however, there is between-person agreement on the causal classification regarding locus. Most would agree, for example, that math aptitude is internal to the person while the quality of the teacher is an external cause of test outcomes. In any case, attribution theory embraces phenomenal causality and it is presumed that emotions depend on "how it seems to me."

To briefly foreshadow the subsequent sections of this article, locus is of prime importance because internal attributions for success are hypothesized to elicit pride and increments in self-esteem.   An internal attribution is considered a necessary condition for the experience of pride, where the self also embraces other entities that fall within one's identity or "ego sphere," such as family, team, school, or country.   Thus, an American can feel proud when another American wins an Olympic medal.   A great phenotypic variety of causes, from math aptitude to athletic prowess, are presumed to elicit the emotion of pride given success because they share the fundamental causal property of locus.

Why, then, might task difficulty be related to pride, as Atkinson (1957) presumed?   Most individuals succeed at an easy task so that doing well is normative, i.e., there is covariation of the task and success. Hence, the attribution for success primarily is to the task itself, an external cause, resulting in little pride. On the other hand, success at a difficult task is inconsistent with social norms. The attribution for success therefore is most likely to the self, perhaps ability or extra effort. Thus, relatively high pride is aroused. In sum, an attribution analysis suggests that the relation between task difficulty and pride is mediated by beliefs regarding the locus of causality. Other hypothesized emotional consequences of self-attributions, including attributions given failure, are more fully examined later in this article.

Causal stability. A second fundamental property of phenomenal causality is causal stability or causal permanence. Some causes are stable and remain in place. For example, lack of co-ordination as a cause of athletic failure, the absence of artistic aptitude as a cause of drawing failure, and unattractiveness as a cause of social rejection

are perceived as stable causes. On the other hand, there are causes perceived to fluctuate over time or that may be amenable to alteration. One may try harder after a failure when that outcome is ascribed to insufficient effort; luck can change from negative to positive; a shift in classroom to a new teacher could eliminate a prior perceived cause of failure; and so on. The causal characteristic of stability plays an important role in expectancies of future success and therefore is assumed to be linked with the emotional experiences of confidence, apprehension, hope, hopelessness, and helplessness.

The property of causal stability is orthogonal to that of locus. There are causes of failure typically regarded as internal and stable (e.g., any aptitude deficiency), internal and unstable (low effort expenditure), external and stable (a poor teacher), and external and unstable (bad luck). Thus, failure perceived as due to low aptitude is presumed to result in lowered self-esteem (as well as other affects later introduced) and low expectancy of future success at that activity (hopelessness); failure due to lack of effort expenditure also reduces self-esteem but one can remain hopeful because effort can be increased; failure because of a poor teacher does not lower personal esteem (it may elicit other externally-directed affects such as anger) but does produce hopelessness in that classroom; and failure because of bad luck also does not lower self-esteem and gives rise to hope rather than hopelessness. In sum, different causal beliefs (e.g., low effort and bad luck) are hypothesized to overlap in the emotional experiences they elicit (hope) because they share one or more causal properties (instability). In addition, they arouse disparate feelings (lack of effort but not bad luck is thought to lower personal esteem) because they differ in another causal characteristic (locus).

Causal control.   A third causal property, controllability, has some overlap with both

locus and stability. Control refers to the amenability of the cause to volitional alteration.

A controllable cause is one that the agent may change. For example, one can try harder if

failure is regarded as due to lack of effort; one can wear different clothing if employment

failure is ascribed to poor appearance; and so on. On the other hand, other causes are not

amenable to personal alteration – they "cannot be otherwise." Failure at basketball

because of short stature, failure at math because of lack of aptitude, and becoming ill

because of toxins in the air are causes the individual cannot alter.   The essence of the

control-no control distinction is captured by contrasting two causes of achievement

failure – lack of effort (under personal control) versus lack of aptitude (uncontrollable).

The control dimension of causality relates closely to judgments of responsibility –

one is held personally responsible only given causes that can be volitionally altered.

Hence, affects aroused in moral situations including guilt, anger, remorse, and sympathy

are presumed to be connected to beliefs about causal controllability. These and other

moral emotions are considered in greater detail later in this manuscript and in the

subsequent article by Rudolph.

It was stated earlier that control is related to the locus and stability causal

dimensions. It is evident that the internal causes of aptitude and effort differ in their

controllability. However, it could be argued that all external causes are uncontrollable by

the actor. Thus, locus and control are not orthogonal dimensions of causality although

they are distinguishable. In addition, however, external causes may be controllable or

uncontrollable by others. For example, if a student fails because of teacher bias, that

cause would be regarded as uncontrollable by the student but controllable by the teacher.

That is, external causes also may be regarded as controllable if the agent of causality, and hence causal locus, shifts to the other.

It is also the case that a controllable cause appears to imply instability inasmuch as it can be altered by the individual. However, there are controllable yet perceived stable causes of success and failure. Characterizing an individual or oneself as industrious or lazy implicates causes that are internal and stable, yet controllable. Conversely, failure ascribed to insufficient effort is typically associated with unstable controllable causality.

In sum, the causal property of control is linked with free will, responsibility and moral emotions. It is distinguishable from the causal dimensions of locus and stability yet also overlaps with or may not be empirically orthogonal to these other two dimensions, although they are conceptually distinct.

<div align="center">Some Hypotheses</div>

What are, then, the hypothesized links from causal beliefs and causal dimensions to emotions? Answers to this question, based on a large body of empirical research, are summarized in Table 1. Here, I treat these associations as hypotheses and do not examine the pertinent empirical evidence.

Some of the most dominant emotions reported following success (upper portion) or failure (lower portion) are shown in Table 1. The first column in that table lists specific causes of success and failure, focusing on aptitude and effort as exemplars because achievement outcomes overwhelmingly are described as determined by "can" and "try." Next, as seen in Table 1, the causes are classified according to the dimension pertinent to the anticipated affective reaction. Self- versus other-directed emotions are

separated in the following columns. For both categories, hypotheses are suggested

regarding their motivational consequences for achievement strivings (enhanced or +

versus inhibited or -) and for social behavior [pro (+) versus anti-social (-)], thus linking

feelings with motivation. Furthermore, expression of these emotions may provide

information about perceived causality and the personality of the expresser, which then

elicit still other emotions that have motivational significance for social behavior (see

Hareli, this issue). In the success situation, where these hypotheses are most clear, such

conjectures are included (see Table 1).

It is evident from Table 1 that many of the elicited emotions exist in interpersonal

contexts. The social implications of emotions are facilitated by an attribution analysis

inasmuch as attribution theory is concerned with social perception and causal inferences

about others. Hence, the understanding of emotional experience is expanded from the

intrapsychic to the social and interpersonal realm given this theoretical perspective.

As revealed in Table 1, the following have been hypothesized regarding causal

dimension-affect relations (with some empirical evidence discussed in the following two

articles by Hareli and Rudolph):

Success-linked emotions

1. Happiness. One experiences happiness following success, regardless of the specific

cause. From an attribution perspective, happiness is a relatively "thoughtless" emotion,

cognitively tied to goals and aspiration level (one subjective determinant of success), and

labeled an outcome-dependent, attribution-independent emotion. Positive mood states

are believed to increase pro-social behavior including help giving. In addition, inasmuch

as happiness can be regarded as a reward (pleasure), it is thought that success increases

achievement strivings, although this may be dependent as well on the causal ascription for that outcome. This presumption links success with the earlier position of motivation theorists regarding the promotional effects of reward on behavior.

Relief also might be considered an outcome dependent-attribution independent emotion, experienced given many causes of success, although it is not likely to be elicited by all causes of success (e.g., high ability) if the expectancy of success is very high. It is not further discussed here because of the paucity of pertinent research investigations.

2-4. <u>Pride, Envy, and Admiration.</u> As already discussed, pride is elicited by internal attributions for success, whether the causes are uncontrollable (aptitude) or controllable (effort). Observers may envy aptitude (when they do not have it), for the advantages of others often are desired. On the other hand, effort expenditure is admired. That is, envy is linked to characteristics and admiration to behavior. Envy and admiration have non-attribution sources as well such as the mere ownership of goods, so that these affective reactions do not have centrality within this conceptual approach because they are not exclusively attribution-dependent.

5-6. <u>Liking (given modesty) and Disliking (given arrogance)</u>. Although others are presumed to envy success due to internal and uncontrollable causes such as intelligence or beauty, the public expression of aptitude or beauty as a cause of a positive outcome is thought to elicit inferences of arrogance and dislike by others. This arouses anti-social behavioral reactions, such as refusal to provide help when needed. The negative reaction to ability claims is suggested to be the case even when the communicated cause is perceived as true (i.e., Einstein should not describe himself as an Einstein after solving a problem nor Cleopatra declare herself a beautiful woman when championing her

triumphs). On the other hand, if Einstein withholds the ability ascription and instead declares he succeeded because of extra effort or good luck, then he will be regarded as modest, be well-liked and elicit positive social reactions.

7. Gratitude. One is grateful towards others (an external cause of success) when the other volitionally helped (controllable causality) that success. Help must be freely provided for gratitude to be felt toward the help giver, with the favor valued by the recipient and costly to the benefactor. Gratitude, in turn, arouses the desire to "balance the scales of justice" and reciprocate positively. Hence, it is a pro-social emotion and a mechanism for social cohesion. The public expression of gratitude is more likely than is the private belief that the other caused one's success inasmuch as this communication elicits inferences of modesty, appreciation, and liking from others. Hence, a display of gratitude at times may be a method of impression management. Privately, individuals often engage in hedonic biasing and prefer to take personal credit for success, which augments pride and self-worth.

8. Surprise. Surprise is elicited by external causes that are unstable and of relatively low probability so it is uncertain if they are "available" as facilitators of success. Hence, an attribution to chance as a cause of winning the lottery should give rise to surprise as well as happiness (outcome-dependent affect). In this case, one might also experience pride if the selected lottery number was derived from some personal "system" (although this is in fact unrelated to the true cause of success, which is chance alone). Many unexpected situations (inconsistent with prior schemas) elicit surprise regardless of causal origins, so again this emotion is not at the core of attribution analyses. As already intimidated, the reader should not be surprised that different antecedents give rise to the same emotion. In

addition, surprise can be elicited as well by unstable causes such as bad luck in failure situations and is not further addressed in that context. It is one of the few emotions elicited by both success and failure.

9-10. Confidence and Apprehension (uncertainty). These affects, just as surprise, are based upon the stability of the cause of success. Western logic specifies that if the cause will remain unchanged, then the past is prologue and will be repeated. Hence, success ascribed to stable causes such as aptitude or work ethic is anticipated to be repeated and feelings of confidence about the future are elicited given these causal construals. On the other hand, success due to unstable causes such as good luck or help from others who subsequently could be unavailable may give rise to uncertainty or apprehension about the future inasmuch as that success will not necessarily be expected to recur.

Failure-linked emotions

11.Unhappiness. Just as happiness is experienced following success regardless of the perceived cause, the unhappiness felt after failure also is independent of causal considerations. However, nonattainment of a goal (punishment or pain) is not necessarily a motivational inhibitor. Instead, the motivational consequences of failure may be positive or negative, in part dependent on perceived causality.

12-13. Shame (humiliation, embarrassment) and Guilt (regret). Shame and guilt are difficult for actors to distinguish. They arise from self-blame (internal attributions), are negative and self-directive, and are persistent and associated with a lowering of personal esteem. However, it is here contended that they are conceptually distinct and elicited by different causes and disparate poles of the controllability causal dimension, as well as having contrasting motivational consequences. As shown in Table 1, an attribution to

low aptitude (ability) elicits shame, i.e., shame is aroused by inadequate public characteristics of the self that are not under volitional control. On the other hand, an ascription to lack of effort, a controllable cause, gives rise to guilt. Hence, shame follows a characterlogical- and guilt (regret) a behavioral-cause that has self-agency and personal responsibility among its antecedents. Furthermore, it is contended that shame leads to the inhibition of achievement striving and social withdrawal, whereas guilt (just as gratitude) promotes positive behaviors, again providing a mechanism for the maintenance of the social system.

14-15. Sympathy (pity) and Scorn (contempt). Sympathy is experienced when the plight of another is ascribed to a cause uncontrollable by that person. This cause may be external to the individual, such as having an unfair teacher or living in a harsh environment, but often is internal to the distressed person, particularly lack of aptitude or some other personal shortcoming. One typically is sympathetic toward the physically and mentally handicapped, the aged, and so on. It is possible that if the difference between the experiencer and the target of the emotion is more qualitative than quantitative (e.g., blind as opposed to having temporary vision problems), then the emotional experience of observers following failure is more akin to pity than sympathy. If sympathy is conveyed to an individual, then the target of this emotion is likely to recognize that the perceived cause of her plight is uncontrollable and, if also internal, will then be more likely to experience shame.

On the other hand, on occasion scorn or contempt is felt when another fails due an internal uncontrollable cause such as lack of aptitude. Scorn involves a downward social comparison and is thought to occur when one needs to feel superior to others. Scorn thus

is similar to shame in that both are presumed to require characterological blame, although scorn is directed outward whereas shame is self-directed.

16. <u>Anger.</u> Anger is a negative emotion directed at an external target, be it an individual, group, or culture. Anger is assumed to be generated by a judgment of other-responsibility for a transgression. That is, anger follows from the belief that the other "could and should have done otherwise." Anger is thus an anti-social reaction, but by communicating what behavior should or should not have been undertaken it may have positive motivation consequences, both in the achievement and social domains. Indeed, if anger is "accepted" as justified, then self-responsibility is aroused and guilt experienced, which is a positive motivator.

17-19. <u>Helplessness, Hopelessness, and Hope.</u> Following failure, if the cause is anticipated to continue into the future, then further nonattainment of the goal is expected. Often, however, there are many sufficient causes of success so that failure given one stable cause may not result in a low expectancy of future success if other causes of success are presented. For example, one may not be able to attain employment because no jobs are available.   However, there is the possibility that a rich uncle will provide money and some other opportunity. Thus, one might experience personal helplessness but not hopelessness. Hopelessness is believed to occur when perceptions of all causes contributing to a prior failure are not subject to change and other facilitating causes are unavailable. Conversely, when failure is ascribed to an unstable cause such as bad luck, lack of sufficient effort, variable weather conditions, and the like, then hope can be maintained because future success is possible.

20. <u>Schadenfreude.</u> This emotion, which denotes joy at the misfortune of another, at times is aroused given a particular sequence of positive followed by negative outcomes. This antecedent sequence at times involves success for which the individual is not personally responsible (e.g., due to others) and then failure for which the individual is held responsible (e.g., insufficient effort). For example, a student who did well on a test due to answers from friends and then fails the next test because of party going rather than studying is likely to elicit feelings of Schadenfreude. In addition, however, other attribution-independent situations might arouse Schadenfreude, such as a disliked person experiencing some negative event.

In sum, a broad swath of hypotheses follows from the belief that there are cause-emotion-behavior relations. Additional emotions (e.g., indignation and jealousy) also appear to be associated with causal beliefs but have been neglected here. Indeed, a great deal (albeit certainly far from all) of emotional and motivational life revolves around causal beliefs.

<div align="center">Home Runs</div>

The "h" principle of alliteration forced a choice between "hits" and "home runs" when championing the merits of the present attribution approach. The former seemed a bit of an understatement and the later an overstatement. Inasmuch as home runs was selected, I next focus on what I regard as the major contributions of the attribution perspective.

At the empirical level (and not documented here), a number of the hypothesized relations are, without question, true. For example, given success, the associations between internal locus and pride, external control and gratitude, and causal stability with

the expectancy-related emotions of confidence and uncertainty are without doubt (see reviews in Hareli & Weiner, 2002, Weiner, 1985). Similarly, given failure, associations between internal control and guilt, external control and anger, lack of control by others and sympathy, internal stability and helplessness, causal stability and hopelessness, and instability with hope also seem certain. Other associations in the table between causal communications and personality inferences such as modesty and arrogance as well as their emotional correlates also find extensive support. And the relations of sympathy, anger, gratitude, and guilt to pro- and anti-social (motivational) reactions are unquestionable. Hence, to repeat what was stated earlier, causal beliefs are at the core of a great deal (but far from all!) of emotional experiences and motivation.

In addition, there are a number of inter-related sets of cause-emotion-behavior correlations so that, in the spirit of Gestalt psychology, the whole is other than or different from the sum of the parts. For example, attributions to ability for success elicit pride, while expressions of this attribution/emotion package can arouse inferences of arrogance and dislike from others. On the other hand, attributions of effort for success also elicit pride but this attribution/emotion communication results in inferences of modesty, admiration and liking.

Another complex emotion inter-relationship involving the self and others occurs in situations of achievement failure. An attribution by observers to lack of ability given failure usually elicits sympathy, which may in turn increase the personal belief that failure is ascribed to an uncontrollable cause (often low ability) and, in turn, arouse personal shame and motivation inhibition. On the other hand, expressions of anger by others following failure, if accepted, promote beliefs in personal responsibility and

ascriptions to controllable causes, producing guilt and motivation facilitation. These

examples illustrate the power of an attribution analysis to go beyond the usual study of

one specific emotion and document the interdependence of actor and observer emotion

systems.

Sets of correlations also are of prime importance in the development of an

attribution based theory of motivation. It has been contended that attributions give rise to

emotions, which then direct action (see reviews in Weiner, 1995, 2006). That is, a

motivated episode can be depicted as going from cognition to emotion to motivation, or

from thinking to feeling to doing. In this conception, emotions bridge the gap between

thinking and action.

This sequential or temporal view of motivation has been most fully documented

in studies of help giving but also finds support in achievement and aggression research.

Pointing out that these disparate fields of study can be subject to the same conceptual

analysis is one of the major contributions of the attribution approach. In the helping

domain, it has been argued that if a need is perceived as due to controllable causes, then

anger is aroused and help withheld. On the other hand, when regarded as needing help

because of uncontrollable causes, others react with sympathy and help giving:

Request (need) for help – perceived controllable cause – anger – no aid

Request (need) for help – perceived uncontrollable cause – sympathy – aid

A meta-analysis including 39 research studies and nearly 8,000 participants

(Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004) has confirmed these paths and also

documented that when emotion is removed from the path, there is no discernable relation

between causal beliefs and action. Thus, helping is directly a matter of the heart and only

indirectly determined by the head. Further, the positive relation between sympathy and help exceeds the association between anger and lack of help; that is, pro-social behavior is more promoted by a pro-social emotion than it is inhibited by an anti-social emotion. I regard the totality of the above discussion as our "home runs."

<div align="center">Headaches and Heartaches</div>

Headaches refer to the shortcomings, real or imagined, and unresolved issues with this attribution approach to emotion and motivation, whereas heartaches refer to my personal reactions to this state. What follows are some of these doubts (A) followed by my reply (B):

1. A. This theory cannot address most of the fundamental issues in motivation, which include predictions regarding the behavior of a deprived rat. That was the setting for the original experimental studies of motivation.

   B. This criticism is correct and, although it may not be essential in the eyes of many others, as a motivation theorist it does disturb me. The proposed thought-affect-action theory is based upon causal beliefs and emotional reactions to past outcomes and the effects of these causal beliefs and emotions on action, particularly in achievement settings but extending as well to other human rather than infrahuman endeavors. I am unhappy (outcome-dependent feeling) that observations regarding hungry and thirsty rats (and humans) fall beyond the range of attribution theory, i.e., the concepts needed to address these phenomena are not included and apparently cannot be included within the theory (resulting in feelings of helplessness and hopelessness as well).

2. A. The proposed conceptual linkages are nothing other than common sense. Of course one must assume credit to experience pride; of course if another intentionally helped you

there often will be gratitude; of course if you think you can't succeed there will be feelings of hopelessness; of course you are more likely to feel sympathy for and help a blind person than a drug addict, or help an obese person who has a thyroid problem more than one who just overeats because of gluttony; and on and on. That is why the experiments are so successful and are often based on simple self-reports.   So, what is new in this?

 B. There is again truth in this statement. This theory attempts to systematize common sense and is correctly labeled a naïve theory (see further discussion in the following article by Hareli). I regard this as a positive attribute of the theory. In addition, however, understanding and insight into the whole are not available to the layperson, who will be surprised to learn that attributions such as lack of effort and bad luck have some similarity, that emotions including surprise and sympathy have some similarity, that emotions provide a link between thinking and doing, and so forth. The whole is other than the sum of the parts.

3. A. The theory cannot really explain help-giving. After all, individuals help their relatives regardless of perceived fault or blame. And help giving is facilitated by the actions of models, by anticipated rewards for good behavior, by the social norms of society or one's peer group, and on and on. Perceived control and sympathy are not the only, and often not the main, determinants of pro-social actions toward others.

  B. That again is partially correct. Help giving is an overdetermined behavior so there will not be a complete theory for this action. Rather, each of the determinants might be dominant in different settings and situations. But certainly perceptions of control and sympathy have their rightful place among these antecedents, as has been overwhelmingly

documented concerning reactions to characterological (e.g., blindness) versus behavioral (e.g., obesity) stigmas.

4. A. The theory specifies that anger is the dominant affective reaction to a moral transgression but the focus of the current empirical literature is disgust. A main principle within your approach to helping is invalid.

  B. Common sense informs us that disgust is elicited in non-moral situations, such as the smell of spoiled food or the sight of garbage. Immoral actions might also elicit this emotion ("I am disgusted by his failure to act"), so disgust could operate in conjunction with anger to motivate moral reactions and behavior. On the other hand, anger is known to have mitigators: one is angry at the intentional harmful act of another but less so if the person is mentally ill and cannot discriminate between right and wrong. However, both a normal and mentally ill individual when covered with garbage elicit disgust – this emotion has no moral mitigators (i.e., relation to volition and free will).   Hence, anger is quite likely to be the more pertinent moral emotion.

5. A. The theory overemphasizes the rationality of emotional life and does not take into account unconscious motivation. After all, most of our emotions are irrational and the real reasons for these feelings are not known.

  B. Once again, this analysis has some (but only some) truth. It is the case that attribution theory offers a rational emotion system. Assume an individual declares: "I never studied for this class and did not understand the material, but the teacher gave A's to everyone. I am so proud of myself." Or, "This mentally handicapped person failed a difficult test. I am really angry at him." Or, "This individual failed the math test because he has no math aptitude. I have high hopes for her score on the next math test." I think

listeners would find these remarks strange, at best, because cause-emotion logic is contradicted. I do not believe that a theory of motivation and emotion should defy common sense, or that correctly predicting what is included within common sense is a shortcoming. To the contrary, a theory of emotion and motivation must include common sense facts!

On the other hand, irrationality is not excluded from the present theoretical system and unconscious motivation processes may be activated when reaching causal conclusions. There is rampant hedonic biasing (taking more credit for success than blame for failure) and individuals may not consciously recognize their emotions and their desires for a positive self-view. But given a causal belief, the theory does specify that a particular emotion will be experienced and this emotion goads broad classes of actions.

<div align="center">Some Concluding Comments</div>

The history of the study of emotion from the perspective of this attribution theorist began with research in motivation, progressing through achievement strivings and then the identification of the myriad emotions linked to success and failure. A great many of the achievement-related affects have causal antecedents, that is, are determined by the perceived reasons for success and failure. But a causal analysis extends to other motivational domains as well, including altruistic actions and aggression. These have been the primary test grounds for a theory of motivated behavior specifying that emotions bridge the gap between causal thinking and action. The empirical confirmations of the hypotheses generated by attribution theory are exceedingly strong and robust, while the theory has far-reaching generality. Furthermore, inasmuch as people are naïve attribution

theorists, they use their understanding of this process to make sense of and to control the emotions of others.

I hope that this overview and the following two articles contribute to and strengthen the belief that an attribution-based conceptual system is a valid and viable approach to the study of emotion (and motivation) that will have lasting significance.

References

Atkinson, J. W. (1957). Motivational determinants of risk-taking behavior.

Psychological Review, 64, 359-373. doi:10.1111/j.1540-

4560.1948.tb01792.x

Hareli, S., & Weiner, B. (2002). Social emotions and personality inferences: A

scaffold for a new direction in the study of achievement motivation.

Educational Psychologist, 37, 183-193. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207.

Heider, F. (1958). The psychology of interpersonal relations. New York: Wiley.

Rudolph, U., Roesch, S. C., Greitemeyer, T., & Weiner, B. (2004). A meta-analytic

review of help giving and aggression from an attributional perspective:

Contributions to a general theory of motivation. Cognition and

Emotion, 18,   815-848. doi:10.1080/02699930341000248.

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion.

Psychological Review, 92, 548-573. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.92.4.548.

Weiner, B. (1995). Judgments of responsibility: A foundation for a theory of social

conduct. New York: Guilford.

Weiner, B. (2006). Social motivation, justice, and the moral emotions. Mahwah, N. J.:

Lawrence Erlbaum Press.

Table 1

Attribution, Causal Dimension, Behavior Relations

Outcome	Cause	Relevant causal dimension	Emotion		Motivational consequences		Personality Inferences		Other's affect	Social motivational consequence from other
			Self directed	Other directed	Achievement	Social	If expressed (when true)	If withheld (when true)		
Success	All	None	Happy		+	+				
	Numerous	None	Relief							
	Aptitude	Internal Uncontrollable	Pride				Arrogant		Dislike Envy	-
								Modest	Like	+
		Stable	Confident		+					
	Effort	Internal Controllable	Pride						Admiration	+
	Others	External Controllable (by others)	Gratitude			+	Appreciative		Like	+
								Unappreciative	Dislike	-
	Luck	External Uncontrollable Unstable	Surprise Apprehension							
Failure	All	None	Unhappy							
	Aptitude	Internal Uncontrollable	Shame Humiliation Embarrassment Hopeless		-	-			Sympathy Pity	+
		Stable	Helpless Depressed		-	-			Scorn Contempt	-
	Effort	Internal Controllable	Guilt Regret		+	+	Responsible	Irresponsible	Anger Schadenfreude (if prior success)	- -
		Unstable	Hope		+					
	Others	External Controllable		Anger		-				
	Luck	External Uncontrollable Unstable	Surprise Hope		+					