The pathetic fallacy: An observer error in social perception

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A number of recent theoretical statements in social psychology have focused on the importance of consistent or balanced cognitions about the self and the environment. The individual is said to have a need to achieve consistency or balance in his cognitions. From Heider's theory of cognitive balance (1958), Festinger's theory of dissonance (1957), Newcomb's theory of communicative acts (1953), or Homans' interaction theory (1950), one would predict that an individual will tend to regard favorably those whose evaluations of him are positive and tend to regard unfavorably those whose evaluations are negative. In a previous paper (Deutsch & Solomon, 1959), we advanced the view that these and other theories in the field of social psychology have within them a hidden assumption that the individual has a positive evaluation of himself. If the opposite assumption is made, namely that the individual evaluates himself negatively, one would predict from these same theories that he would tend to view negatively another who esteems him and tend to esteem those who view him negatively.

To test the foregoing notion, we conducted an experiment (Deutsch & Solomon, 1959) in which the S's: (a) was led to evaluate her performances on group-relevant tasks either favorably or unfavorably; (b) was led to believe that her group either won or lost a contest with another group because of, or in spite of, her performance; and (c) was exposed to a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of her performance and desirability as a team mate by a note which was presumably from another member of her group. The S provided questionnaire data including her self-evaluation and an appraisal of the team mate (i.e., the note writer) who evaluated her. The data confirmed our expectation that the S's evaluation of her

3 I wish to express my indebtedness to Mrs. Norah Rosenau for her assistance in collecting and analyzing the data presented in this paper.
own performance would strongly influence her reactions to the evaluations made of her by another.

The present studies are an outgrowth of the earlier research. They repeat, in the abstract, the prior experiment but ask how an observer (O), rather than a participant (S), would evaluate the note writer. Two experiments were conducted. The first was to see whether our earlier explanation of the S's reaction to the note writer was a necessary one. Perhaps the S's reaction could be explained in terms of how consistent with reality she perceived the note writer's evaluation to be. In the initial experiment, the S's evaluation of her own performance was presumably realistic (since it was based upon the score she received from the E). Hence, it might be that the S reacted in terms of the perceived accuracy or realism of the note writer rather than in terms of how consistent the note writer's evaluation was with her (the S's) self-evaluation. If this were so, one would expect that an O, having the same information as S, but not involved as a participant, would evaluate the note writer in essentially the same way as S.

The results of the first observer study, which are summarized in Table 1, showed rather striking differences between the S's and O's evaluations of the note writer. These differences indicated that the tendency of the Ss to respond more favorably to the note writers whose notes were consistent rather than inconsistent with the S's self-evaluations was not an artifact of the tendency to be more favorably disposed toward realistic notes per se. The O's were markedly more favorable in their evaluations of the note writers who wrote positive notes (e.g., "You're the person I most prefer to have on the same team again.") rather than negative notes (e.g., "You're the person I least prefer to have on the same team again.") to Ss who received low scores. In contrast, the actual Ss who received low scores were slightly more favorable to the negative note writers.

A tentative explanation for the discrepancy between the ratings made by the Ss and the Os is offered in terms of the tendency of the O's to commit the pathetic fallacy. The pathetic fallacy inheres in the belief that a person who undergoes a failure will experience it as a decisive devaluation of herself which she has to defend herself against by negating, denying, or concealing the failure. From the pathetic fallacy, it follows that it would be inconsiderate to recognize openly or to be critical of another person's failure but considerate to ignore it or to be reassuring. These associated beliefs are fallacious insofar as those actually undergoing failure do not in fact respond in such a defensive manner.

An alternative explanation of the results, which could not be ruled out due to a defect in the experimental design, is that the differences between the Os and Ss simply reflect that they are different types of people, drawn from two different segments of the population. The Ss (who were telephone operators) as compared with the Os (who were college students) might be less status-mobile and, hence, less concerned with maintaining the face of success.

The studies reported in this paper repeat and elaborate our first observer study using as Os telephone operators who were similar in relevant respects to the telephone operators who were the Ss in our initial study. In the first observer study, the Os were instructed to take each of two orientations in turn. They were first
asked to indicate their own evaluation of the note sender. Then they were asked to predict how the actual S responded. It was found that the Os' responses tended to be more similar to the Ss' actual responses to the note writers than were the Os' predictions. In addition to the two observer orientations employed in the first study, a third orientation was employed in the present studies: the Os were asked to predict how they would have reacted to the note writer if they had been the actual Ss. We hypothesized that this would improve their predictions since (assuming a similarity between the Os and Ss) this would give them more information upon which to base their predictions.

**Method**

The Os received extra pay for participating in the experiment immediately before or after their regular work shift. The experiment was conducted in the building in which they worked, with groups of Os varying in size from 10 to 27. They were given the following experimental instructions by E:

One of the ways that we form impressions and feelings about new acquaintances is by evaluating what they do in social situations. This research is designed to see how accurately people can form impressions of another person when they have very little information about that person. I am going to describe a social situation to you in which someone participated and then I shall ask you to judge her personality on some rating forms.

Here is a description of the social situation. Two teams of women were in competition with each other for a prize. Each person sat in a separate booth and did not know or see who her own team mates were. Each person on the team had the same task to perform and each person was given a score depending upon the number of correct answers she made. The task was described as a task which measured their ability to do flexible thinking. It was a new task which none of them had seen before. Each team had 4 members, so that the team score was the total score for the group. The team with the highest total score won the competition. Clearly then, if any particular team member did very well, she could help her team win or if she did very poorly, she could make her team lose.

After the game, each member of the two teams received a scoreboard which indicated how well each player scored and which team won. The higher the person's score, the better it is. On the next page is the scoreboard showing how Team A and Team B made out.

Since the players performed in separate booths and did not know or see who their team mates were, they were given an opportunity to communicate with each other in a particular manner. Each person was asked to write a brief note to one other member of their team and was told to comment on the other person's performance and to indicate whether or not she wanted to be on the same team again with the person to whom she was writing the note.

We are going to show you a copy of the note that Person 1 of Team A wrote to Person 4 of Team A. From what Person 1 (the note sender) has written in this situation and how she has written it, you are to form as strong an impression of Person 1 (the note sender) as you can.

The "scoreboard" and the "note" which the S presumably was given were systematically varied for the Os, paralleling the design of the initial experiment. In addition, a fourth factor concerned with three types of observer orientations was added, thus resulting in a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ factorial design. There were four Os in each of the 24 cells of the resulting factorial design. The four factors were:

*Individual Success (IS) versus Individual Failure (IF).* In the IS treatment the Os were led to believe that the S had obtained the highest score among the eight people on both teams and that the S's score was slightly less than twice as high as the average score of all the others while in the IF treatment the S had obtained the lowest score, which was slightly more than half of the average score for the others.

*Group Success (GS) versus Group Failure (GF).* In the GS treatment the Os were led to believe that S's team won the contest either because of S's score (IS,GS) or despite S's score (IF,GS). In the GF treatment S's team presumably lost either because of S's score (IF,GF) or despite S's score (IS,GF). This variable was only introduced to maintain parallel conditions with our original experiment. It had little effect in the original experiment and practically none in the present experiments. It will not be discussed further in this paper.

*Positive Note (P) versus Negative Note (N).* The positive note stated: "You are the person I most prefer to have on my team in the next contest." The negative note, which was in the same handwriting, stated: "You are the person I least prefer to have on my team in the next contest."

*Observer Orientation.* The Os in filling out the rating scales and questionnaire (described below) were instructed to take one of the three following orientations: (a) They were to predict how the actual S would have rated the note writer (P orientation); (b) they were to indicate how they would have rated the note writer if they had been the actual S (I orientation); or (c) they were simply to indicate their own evaluations of the note writer (O orientation).

The Os were asked to rate the note writer on two types of rating scales. One set of scales were 9-point scales, ranging from "very high in this characteristic" to "very low in this characteristic"; the characteristics to be rated were: "desirability as a team mate," "intelligence," "team spirit," "actually a good friend," and "how much she liked her." The other set of rating scales were in the form of the Semantic Differential. It consisted of bipolar 7-point scales which included scales heavily loaded with 3 factors identified by Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum (1957): An evaluative factor ("good-bad," "nice-awful"), an activity factor ("fast-slow," "active-passive"), and a strength factor ("weak-strong," "timid-forceful"). On an a priori basis other scales were included to measure warmth ("warm-cold," "affectionate-
unaffectionate”), status (“significant-insignificant,” “important-unimportant”), effectiveness (“masterful-fumbling,” “effective-ineffective”), and self-control (“neat-sloppy,” “conscientious-careless”).

In addition the Os answered four multiple choice questions which were concerned with the note writer’s purpose in writing the note she wrote.

RESULTS

Tables 2, 3, and 4 present data which enable us to compare the ratings of the note writers by the actual Ss in our initial experiment with the ratings the Os made of the note writers from the three different observer orientations. We have converted the ratings into “z-scores” so as to facilitate intercomparisons.

PREDICTED VERSUS ACTUAL EVALUATIONS OF THE NOTE WRITER

Table 2 indicates that the ratings of the note writer by the actual Ss in the various experimental treatments can be ordered in terms of favorableness as follows: P,IS > N,IF ≡ P, IF > N,IS. The ordering for the predicting Os is rather different: P,IS ≡ P,IF > N,IS > N,IF. In effect, the Os predict that the Ss will respond rather negatively to criticism after failure but will react more neutrally to criticism after success. They also predict that the Ss will respond equally favorably to praise after success or failure. In contrast, the actual Ss respond most negatively to criticism after success and most favorably to praise after success; but after failure they are favorable to the note writer whether he praises or criticizes.

An examination of specific comparisons between the Ss and the predictions of the Os (S-Pr in Table 3) suggests that the differences in the way the Ss and the Pr Os rate the note writer in the N,IF treatment account for much of the error in prediction. The Os, as compared with the Ss, reverse and accentuate the differences between the N,IF and P,IF treatment and between the N,IF and N,IS treatment. They also reduce the differences between the P,IS and P,IF treatment and between the P,IS and N,IS treatment.

THE EFFECT OF OBSERVER ORIENTATION UPON EVALUATION OF THE NOTE WRITER

From Tables 2 and 3, it is evident that the three observer orientations did not produce markedly different ratings of the note writer. The ratings of the Os with the I and O orientations tended to be more similar to each other than they were to the ratings of Os with the Pr orientation. They also tended to be more similar to the

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPERIMENTAL TREATMENT</th>
<th>P, IS</th>
<th>P, IF</th>
<th>N, IS</th>
<th>N, IF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desirability as a team mate</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>-1.05</td>
<td>-1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
<td>-1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirability as a friend</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>-.94</td>
<td>-.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>-.71</td>
<td>-.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative factor</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>-.80</td>
<td>-.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-.96</td>
<td>-.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>-.61</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness factor</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>-.65</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.61</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For the S the total N is 112; for the I orientation total N is 32; for the O orientation total N is 32; for the Pr orientation total N is 32.
### Table 3

**Differences Between the Ss and the Os, for Each of the Three Observer Orientations and Among the Os in Rating the Writer on Various Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic and comparison</th>
<th>Interaction*</th>
<th>N, IF</th>
<th>P, IS</th>
<th>N, IF</th>
<th>P, IS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desirability as a team mate</strong></td>
<td>S,P</td>
<td>1.16*</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S,O</td>
<td>1.51*</td>
<td>1.27*</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>1.74*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S,R</td>
<td>2.43*</td>
<td>1.37*</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.92*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,I</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,P</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,P</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desirability as a friend</strong></td>
<td>S,I</td>
<td>2.04*</td>
<td>1.66*</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S,O</td>
<td>2.09*</td>
<td>1.53*</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>1.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S,R</td>
<td>2.86*</td>
<td>1.79*</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>2.60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,I</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,P</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,P</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>1.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluative factor</strong></td>
<td>S,I</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.31*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S,O</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.27*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S,R</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.43*</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.99*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,I</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,P</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,P</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness factor</strong></td>
<td>S,I</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S,O</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S,R</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,I</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,P</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O,P</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The interaction term is equal to P, IS + N, IF - P, IF - N, IS.

The values in the table represent the differences between the two groups being compared (e.g., the Ss and the Os with the I orientation) on the given statistical measure cited at the top of the column. Thus, the comparison of S,I on the interaction is the value for the Ss minus the value for the Os with the I orientation for the interaction term (P, IS + N, IF - P, IF - N, IS).

### Table 4

**Ss' Self-Evaluations and Os' Predictions of Ss' Self-Evaluations Under the Different Observer Orientations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental treatment</th>
<th>Statistically significant comparisons (p &lt; .05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P, IS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluative factor</strong></td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness factor</strong></td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observer error in social perception</strong></td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictions of Ss' Self-Evaluations</strong></td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The questions for the O and R orientations were similar. For the O orientation it was: "How did Person 1 of Team A feel about himself and her performance after she received the note?" For the R orientation it was: "How do you think Person 4 of Team A actually rated the way she felt about herself and her performance after she received the note?"*

by the Ss' scores, the self-ratings of the Ss are considerably more influenced by this variable.

### Trends in the postexperimental questionnaire data

A composite portrait of the Os' conceptions of the purpose of the note writer may be drawn from Os' responses to several questions on the postexperimental questionnaire ("Did the note writer want Person 4 on the same team again?" "What was the note writer really trying to make Person 4 feel?" "How considerate was the note writer being?" "What was the note writer trying to do?").

The note writer in the P, IS treatment is seen as really wanting the S on her team again and states this in her note to make the S feel good or simply because it is so. Her note is viewed as realistic and considerate, but not especially considerate. The note writer in the P, IF treatment is seen as wanting the S on her team again and her purpose in letting the S know this is to be helpful and to make the S feel good. Her action is thought to be more considerate than usual.

In the N, IS treatment the note writer was seen as probably not wanting the S on the same team and as writing the note either to present herself in a good light, or to be nasty, or to be realistic. Her note was viewed as inconsiderate. The purposes attributed to the note writer in the N, IF treatment are similar to those found in the N, IS treatment except that it is more definite that they do not want the S on the same team again and the note is not seen as an attempt to present the note writer in a good light but rather as realistic or nasty. Three of the seven Os with the Pr orientation ratings made by the actual Ss than were the ratings of the Pr Os. However, the differences among the observer orientations are, with few exceptions, not statistically significant.

### Actual and predicted self-evaluations

The Ss' self-evaluations as influenced by their own performance and the note they received are rather different from the predictions made by the Os (see Table 4). For the actual Ss, the note per se had little effect upon their self-evaluations (note, however, that the Ss were affected consistently when the note was consistent with their own experience). The Os predict a considerable effect of the notes. While both the Ss' self-ratings and the Os' predictions are influenced...
predicted that the Ss would think the note writer in the N,IF treatment had been trying to be nasty; none of the five Os with this orientation in the N,IS treatment predicted that the S would think this of the note writer. (This accounts for the tendency of the Pr Os to rate the N,IS note writers more favorably than the N,IF note writers.)

DISCUSSION

The Ss' evaluations of the note writer, in the initial experiment by Deutsch and Solomon (1959), were explained in terms of the operation of three factors: (a) the tendency of the Ss to respond more favorably to evaluations which were consistent with their own self-evaluations (the self-other consistency effect); (b) the tendency to respond more favorably to positive than to negative notes per se (the positivity effect); and (c) a slight tendency for the Ss to evaluate the note writer whose performance was better rather than worse than her own more favorably on characteristics that were directly relevant to performance (the "comparison effect").

The striking differences between the ratings by the Ss and the Os suggest that, in this initial experiment, the tendency of the Ss to respond more favorably to the note writers whose notes were consistent with the S's self-evaluation was not an artifact of the tendency to be more favorably disposed toward realistic notes per se. Clearly, unlike the Ss, the Os were not more favorable to the note writers who wrote the more realistic notes (i.e., the P,IS and N,IF treatments as compared with the P,IF and N,IS treatments). Hence, it is apparent that the S's actual experiences of success or failure in the experimental situation were a critical factor in determining her reactions to a positive or negative note.

Os' ratings, like those of the Ss, were influenced by the tendency to rate the positive note writers more favorably than the negative note writers (we term this influence the positivity effect). The positivity effect had greater influence on the Os than on the Ss but, even so, the positivity effect does not suffice to explain the Os' ratings. Especially, it does not explain why the differences between the P,IS and P,IF ratings are relatively smaller for the Os compared with the Ss or why the N,IS as compared with the N,IF note writers are rated relatively more favorably by the Os than by the Ss.

Observer error in social perception

These results are quite similar to the results of our first observer study (see Table 1), although the differences between the Os and Ss are somewhat more marked in the first study, where college students rather than telephone operators were used as Os. Thus, it is apparent that although the nature of the Os, as well as their orientation in observing, may have an effect on the results, there are substantial differences between the ratings of the Os and Ss even when they are both drawn from highly similar populations. The differences between the telephone operator Os and the college student Os follow from our explanation of the differences between the Os and Ss in terms of the pathetic fallacy (see below) if we assume that the college students, being more status-mobile, are more concerned with the "face of success" than are the telephone operators.

The explanation in terms of the pathetic fallacy starts with the assumption that in any social encounter each individual puts forth some claims as to what sort of a person he is and what sort of behavior he can expect from the others who are interacting with him. The face of an individual in a given situation consists of the claims the individual makes as to what sort of person he should be considered to be in that situation (Goffman, 1955). The "claims" are usually made implicitly rather than explicitly in manner, gestures, tone of voice; they are often unconscious rather than conscious. They become most evident when something goes astray—e.g., as when a man who puts himself forward as being honest is challenged and reacts indignantly, or when a man who puts himself forward as competent makes an obvious mistake and reacts with embarrassment. In stable, on-going social groups, there is normative pressure on the individuals not only to respect their own claims but also to respect each other's claims.

It is reasonable to assume that the claims of an individual (as well as the claims he expects others to have) reflect the dominant social values of his group as well as his idiosyncratic experience. Thus the face put forth by most Japanese is likely to differ systematically from the face put forth by most Americans. Many of the anthropological and sociological writings (e.g., Kluckhohn, 1949, and Mead, 1942) about American culture have stressed the value complex centering around success. This value complex results not only in a drive to be successful but also in a motivation to appear
successful. As Ichheiser (1949, p. 32) has indicated: “our tendency
to interpret and evaluate each other and ourselves in terms of suc-
cess and failure can be observed in people’s habit of ‘keeping smiling’
or of maintaining other pretenses of ‘being fine.’”

Granted the pervasive success complex of American culture, it
seems reasonable to believe that the Os would assume that the Ss
would be concerned with the maintenance of the appearance of being
successful after an experience of failure, and that it would be tactful
to help the Ss do this. Tact, in a sense, required by the situation;
one “ought” to be tactful. However, to be tactful when it is
counter to one’s own interest (as in welcoming a poor performer on
to one’s team) is to be particularly considerate or praiseworthy
(Heider, 1958). Hence, the Os would be expected to respond
quite favorably to a note writer whose note helped the S to maintain
the social appearance of success despite the S’s actual failure (i.e.,
in the P,IF treatment) but rather unfavorably to a note writer
whose note showed no consideration of the S’s need to maintain
face (i.e., in the N,IF treatment).

In a similar vein, it is reasonable to believe that the Os would
assume that an S who experienced success would have her face,
or claim to being successful, socially validated. Her social face would
not be damaged and hence would not need repair. Hence, a note
writer who responded favorably to an S who experienced success
(i.e., in the P,IS treatment) would be viewed as being realistically
considerate but not helpful (since no help is needed); no special
credit is due her. On the other hand, a note writer who responded
negatively to an S who experienced success (i.e., in the N,IS treat-
ment) would be going out of her way to flout the normative require-
ments of the situation and reject the success that the S has experi-
nenced. Hence, one would expect the Os to rate her rather un-
favorably.

We have attempted to explain the Os’ reactions to the note
writer by assuming that the Os compared the note writer’s behavior
with the behavior that the note writer ought to have engaged in if
her behavior were consonant with social norms centering around
the maintenance of the appearance of success. For the Os, these
norms are seen to be more critically relevant to experiences of failure
than of success: the person who has experienced failure is more

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socially vulnerable than the person who has experienced success.
Were the social norms concerning the maintenance of face the only
factor influencing the Os’ ratings of the note writer, one would
have expected the note writers to have been rated in the following
order of favorableness, comparing the different treatments: P,IF ≳
P,IS ≳ N,IF ≳ N,IS. Comparing this ordering with the ordering
for the actual Ss (P,IS > N,IF ≳ P,IF > N,IS) suggests that
the differences between the ratings of the P,IF and N,IF note writers
(favoring the P,IF note writer) would be the most sensitive
indicator of the existence of the pathetic fallacy in the Os. The data
of our two observer experiments are, for the most part, consistent with
this interpretation. The major exception is the tendency of the
predicting Os in the second experiment to rate the N,IS note writers
more favorably than the N,IF note writers.

So far our discussion has not provided an explanation of why
the Ss were less concerned with maintaining face than the Os. (We
say less concerned, rather than not concerned, because the positivity
effect suggests that the Ss were influenced by the social norms
concerning face in evaluating the note writer.) We suggest that
the explanation lies in the differences inherent in Os’s position, as
compared with S’s, with regard to knowledge about the character-
istics of S. The O had only one item of information about the char-
acteristics of S, namely, whether she performed well or poorly
relative to her peers. This was her total information. We suggest
that O was led to characterize the total person of S by the total
(i.e., limited) information she possessed about S. Hence, for O
the success or failure of S was not perceived as specific and limited
—a single event in a complex set of other past and present events—
but was rather perceived as something decisive for the characteriza-
tion of S.

S, on the other hand, could see the experience of success or failure
in its proper context as a specific, limited event which was not
decisive for characterizing herself as a success or failure. If this
reasoning is correct, the Os would, in effect, have perceived S’s
self-esteem to be more at issue than S herself would have experi-
enced and O would, hence, be more likely to assume that face-maint-
aining behavior from the note writer would be appropriate and
would be welcomed by the S. The S, on the other hand, might
respond with mixed feelings toward face-maintaining behavior from the note writer: viewing it as tactless tact—i.e., unwarranted pity—which may, nevertheless, have been well-intentioned.

Studies of the reactions of the war-injured to help by Ladicu, Hanfmann, and Dembo (1947) give support to the explanations we have offered for the differences in reactions of the Ss and Os. They report that in the majority of instances help is reacted to negatively. They indicate that “The most frequent reason for the rejection of help is its negative social aspects—the status discrimination and the devaluation of the handicapped man as a person . . .” (p. 100). As in our experiment, the helper often appears to characterize the injured totally or decisively in terms of his disability and overreacts in such a way as to produce a negative reaction in the injured who is able to see his disability as one of many aspects of himself and not a decisive aspect in self-evaluation. The observer or helper is committing what we term the pathetic fallacy.

In our first observer experiment, there was some evidence that the observer orientation affected the Os such that when they were asked to predict the Ss’ ratings they tended to commit the pathetic fallacy to a greater degree than when asked to give their own impressions of the note writer. Similarly, the Os in the second observer experiment with the Pr orientation appear to have been more liable to the pathetic fallacy than the Os with either of the other two observer orientations. Thus, the N,IF note writers are rated most unfavorably, the differences between the ratings of the P,IF and N,IF note writers tend to be larger, and also the differences between the Ss and the Os for the interaction between the note and performance (P,IS + N,IF — P,IF — N,IS) are consistently greater for the Pr Os.

The direction of the difference between the observer orientations is what one would expect if one assumes that: (a) the Os, if they had been the actual Ss, would also have seen her experience of success or failure as a specific, limited event which was not decisive for characterizing herself as a success or failure; and (b) that the Os with the I and O orientations were more likely to react, personally, as though they were the actual Ss than the Os who were asked to predict what the S, an unknown person, might do.

The reactions of the Pr Os suggest a general principle which may influence an O’s expectations with regard to another person’s behavior. The principle, which may be termed the fallacy of situationism (or the fallacy of the empty organism), is that when an O does not attribute inner structure (e.g., personality characteristics) to another person he is likely to expect that the person’s feelings and behavior, including his feelings about himself, are determined solely by external events (such as praise or criticism). The converse of this principle is the fallacy of personalism (or the fallacy of the closed organism) which is that when an O does not attribute psychological significance to the person’s situation, he is likely to expect that the person’s feelings and behavior are determined solely by inner events (e.g., personality characteristics, past experiences, instinct, mood). It is apparent that our experimental procedures were such as to predispose the Os, particularly those with a Pr orientation, to view the S as an empty organism and, hence, to lead them to the fallacy of situationism. One may wonder if the different research procedures employed by investigators (i.e., Os) with different orientations (e.g., social or clinical) may not predispose them to either the fallacy of situationism or the fallacy of personalism.

Summary

We have compared how a subject (S) and an observer (O) react to a team mate of S who responds (in a written note) either positively or negatively to the S after S has performed very well or very poorly on a team-relevant task. The responses of the S and the O to the note writer systemically differ; the O’s predictions of S’s responses to the note writer differ more from S’s actual responses than do O’s direct responses to the note writer.

An explanation for the discrepancy between the ratings made by the S and by the O was offered in terms of the pathetic fallacy: the belief that a person who experiences a failure in some regard will experience it as a decisive devaluation of himself; one which he has to defend himself against socially, by attempting to conceal the discrepancy between his social face of success and the actuality of failure. It is assumed that the pathetic fallacy results from: (a) the pervasive success orientation characteristic of American culture that places considerable emphasis on maintaining the appearance of success; and (b) O’s limited information about S which would be likely to lead O to characterize S, decisively, in terms of this information.
Value, information, and conformity behavior

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The purpose of the present investigation was to study the effects on conformity behavior of two variables, value and information. By value we mean the degree of importance attached to a behavior-relevant area; by information we mean the amount of knowledge possessed in that area. Conformity behavior is defined as a change in behavior, following information about the behavior of "others," so that the new behavior is similar to that of the "others."

A number of recent studies have investigated conformity behavior as a function of situational variables, such as majority-minority ratio (Asch, 1952), degree of interaction among group members (Bovard, 1951), characteristics of the potential influencer (Lefkowitz, Blake, & Mouton, 1955; Mausner, 1954a), etc. A second direction of research has focused on the personality traits of the potential influencee, such as creativity, rigidity, ascendance-submission, etc. (Barron, 1952; Crutchfield, 1955; Hilgen, Blake, Mouton, & Olinstead, 1956). Characteristics of the individual (other than those typically measured by personality questionnaires), such as his degree of past experience with a behavior area, his degree of divergence in behavior from "others," have received some, but far less, attention (Mausner, 1954a; Festinger, Gerard, Hymovitch, Kelly, & Raven, 1951). The two independent variables of the present study, value and information, are of this latter type.

The following specific hypotheses were tested: (a) conformity behavior, as defined above, is inversely related to the degree to which individuals value, or place importance upon, the relevant behavior area; (b) conformity behavior is inversely related to the

* This paper is based on an M.A. thesis conducted by the first author under the guidance of the second and third authors while all were at the University of Colorado.