An Attributional Analysis of Students' Interactions: The Social Consequences of Perceived Responsibility

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Recent research on why some children are disliked by their classmates, why students do or do not help one another, and how children manage to get along with teachers and classmates is reviewed in this article. A motivational approach focusing on attribution theory is used to examine these questions. Inferences of responsibility and feelings of anger and sympathy are documented to impact students' negative social responses (rejection and neglect) as well as their willingness to help their classmates. Students' understanding of the responsibility-emotion-behavior links is proposed to influence their self-presentation strategies, such as excuse giving and seeking social approval.

INTRODUCTION

Starting the first day at school, students are likely to be preoccupied by questions such as: "Do kids in my class like me?" or "Why wasn't I picked on the team?" (e.g., Rizzo, 1989). Although the specific social concerns change as students move from elementary to high school, relationships and especially peer interactions are clearly important to them. Furthermore, issues regarding others' approval and fear of being negatively judged or labeled by classmates are likely to override academic concerns and interfere with achievement, as illustrated in the following newspaper excerpt.

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On the morning last semester [when] an . . . elementary school student Joseph Po-
lissky was to take a standardized state test to evaluate his math and reading skills,
the 12-year-old Russian immigrant was called a "vodka-chugger" by a schoolmate
for the umpteenth time. 'At first, I feel hatred and then I feel sad,' Joseph said,
adding that he could not concentrate on the problems before him, he was so an-
gry . . . (Chavez, 1992, p. 20).

There is a considerable amount of research documenting that social
problems in school not only interfere with students' concurrent achievement
and motivation but they are also associated with severe long-term conse-
quences, including dropping out and mental health problems (Cowen, Ped-
erson, Babigian, Izzo, and Trost, 1973; Kupersmidt, Coie, and Dodge, 1990;
Morison and Masten, 1991; Parker and Asher, 1987; Roff, Sells, and Gold-
en, 1972). Yet educational psychologists rarely study students' social rela-
tions and interactions. This is somewhat surprising given that it is within
the interest of educational psychologists to identify and study conditions
that enhance learning and improve achievement and adjustment outcomes.

The goal of this review is to analyze three interrelated issues pertinent
to social motivation: why some children are disliked by their classmates,
why students do or do not help one another, and how children manage to
get along with classmates as well as teachers. There are several possible
motivational conceptions and theoretical constructs that lend themselves
to the analyses of social behavior and interactions. Constructs such as self-
efficacy (Bandura, 1986), goal orientations (Dweck and Leggett, 1988;
Nicholls, 1990), and intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation (Lepper, Greene, and
Nisbett, 1973) all are appropriate and applicable to explain a range of social
interactions in the classroom. But these motivational constructs primarily
tap actors' beliefs about self and thus explain behavior purely from an in-
trapsychological perspective. When examining social interactions, this may
be a somewhat limited approach, given that much of interpersonal behavior
is determined by perceptions about others (Heider, 1958; Jones, 1990) and
beliefs about how others view oneself (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934).

We therefore restrict our review to another motivational thrust,
namely, attribution theory, because this enables us to analyze perceptions
of others as well as beliefs about others' views of oneself (Weiner, 1985,
1986). Attribution theory and its contribution to understanding achieve-
ment behavior was recently reviewed in this journal by Graham (1991).
Graham documented how students' and teachers' causal attributions of
positive and negative academic experiences predict their emotional reac-
tions and explain a range of achievement-related behaviors. Whereas the
emphasis of her review was on *self-perceptions* and *achievement* motivation,
we continue her lead but switch the focus to *other-perceptions* and appli-
cations of attribution theory in the *affiliative* domain. We are not myopic
enough to think that attribution theory answers all questions pertinent to

social motivation or to believe that other approaches do not contribute to these issues. Nonetheless, in the present context we concentrate on this conception to point out how causal beliefs contribute to students' affiliative and in turn academic behaviors in school settings.

When applying attribution theory to the study of social interactions, we pay particular attention to one causal property, namely, perceived controllability, and its impact on inferences of responsibility. Inferences about the responsibility of others are social judgments rather than self-related cognitions and are defined here as the perceived control others have over their behavior or plight, or the degree to which actions and outcomes are thought to be voluntarily or intentionally produced (Fincham and Jaspers, 1980; Shaver, 1985). Although judgments of responsibility are often associated with morality and moral reasoning, we are not concerned here about reasoning processes and the self-evaluation of conduct. Rather, we examine the affective, behavioral, and social consequences of responsibility judgments directed toward others. In other words, we do not examine children's reasoning about moral dilemmas, such as "Should one steal a drug for a dying mother?", but rather we consider students' understanding of everyday social dilemmas, such as "If one shows up late for an appointment, how will one's peers or the teacher react?"

There are a number of social behaviors that one might study focusing on perceptions of responsibility. These include aggression and other deviant behaviors that teachers and parents are often concerned about, as well as various adaptive and prosocial behaviors. We examine here more specific behaviors that relate to (1) reactions toward others, and (2) the manipulation of others' reactions toward self. Under the former topic, we study both negative (social rejection and neglect) and positive (help-giving) responses among classmates. Under the second topic of impression management, we analyze two types of strategies students use to manipulate classmates' and teachers' reactions toward self: excuse making and eliciting social approval.

The participants in the reviewed studies range from pupils in primary grades to college students. Although the majority of these research studies are confined to a single age group and very few provide insights into developmental questions, we do discuss developmental implications of certain attributional processes.

REACTIONS TOWARD OTHERS

Reactions toward classmates can range from extremely positive and kind to very negative and unfriendly (as depicted in the newspaper excerpt

above). Among the most powerful determinants of the valence of social behavior is the actors' attitude or sentiment about the other (Hartup and Laursen, 1991; Heider, 1958; Jones, 1990). Individuals react in positive ways to people they like and display negative reactions to those they dislike (Hymel, 1986, Hymel, Wagner, and Butler, 1990; Juvonen, 1991b). In this section, we go beyond this conclusion by taking the perspective of the re-actors as well as the targets of negative peer responses and analyze their thoughts of (perceptions of responsibility, expectations) and feelings (anger and sympathy) toward another.

Children's Perceptions of Unpopular Peers

When interpreting behaviors and attitudes of those who reject or ne-glect a classmate, one can approach the topic by asking what personal char-acteristics elicit these reactions. Sociometric and simulational studies on elementary school-age students suggest that aggression, antisocial behav-iors, physical unattractiveness, shyness, and various physical deviations (e.g., disabilities) are associated with unpopular peer status (Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli, 1982; Coie, Dodge, and Kupersmidt, 1990; Maas, Marecek, and Travers, 1978; Newcomb, Bukowski, and Pattee, 1993; Sigelman and Begley, 1987). Thus, unpopular children are likely to stand out in their peer group (e.g., classroom) because of their idiosyncrasies. However, some of these atypical characteristics elicit more negative reactions than do oth-ers. For example, children who display aggressive behaviors or those who are obese are typically rejected (actively disliked), whereas shy children or those with disabilities are merely not liked and neglected rather than re-jected.

A variety of explanations can be offered for disparities in negative reactions toward unpopular peers. On the one hand, aggressive children are more disruptive and disturbing of others than are those who are shy. Thus, perceived aversiveness and negative impact on classmates surely af-fects peer liking. On the other hand, reactions to "different" classmates, such as aggressive or shy peers, are amenable to attributional analyses in-asmuch as perceived deviance is conceptualized as a negative or nonnormal event that evokes why-questions, which are the grist for the attributionists' mill (Wong and Weiner, 1981). When students deal with a classmate whom they consider as different from others, they are likely to wonder: "Why does Johnny always hit others?", "Why is Sue so fat?", or "Why does Tina cry so easily?" Peers' perceptions of the causes, and specifically their judg-ments of personal responsibility ("Is it Tina's fault that she cries so fre-quently?", "Does she want to cry?"), propelled by automatic and controlled

processes, influence how they feel about the classmate (Weiner, 1986). When deviant peers are held responsible for their idiosyncrasies, anger and dislike are experienced, which give rise to social rejection (Averill, 1982; Weiner, 1986). Lack of responsibility, on the other hand, elicits sympathy and prosocial rather than antisocial reactions (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989; Graham, Doubleday, and Guarino, 1984; Hoffman, 1982).

Links between perceptions of responsibility, affective reactions, and peer rejection were systematically examined in two recent studies of Finnish and American preadolescents (Juvonen, 1991a, 1992). Sixth-grade students rated how responsible were specific classmates they considered "different from others" because of atypical behavior, physical features, or personality characteristics. They also rated how much anger and sympathy they felt for these peers, how likely they would include these persons in desirable social events with other classmates (e.g., invite to a party), and whether they would help these individuals when they needed support. The results revealed that classmates who displayed antisocial behaviors were believed to be responsible for their conduct, whereas shy children or peers with disabilities were not held responsible for their deviance (Juvonen, 1991a). Furthermore, as shown in Fig. 1, the greater the extent to which students perceived classmates to be responsible for their idiosyncrasies, the more anger and the less sympathy they reported. Anger in turn predicted increased rejection and decreased support, whereas sympathy predicted willingness to provide support (Juvonen, 1992).

To test the independent and combined effects of perceived responsibility and aversiveness on children's social responses, perceived controllability and annoyance of three atypical characteristics that children frequently report as the causes of both boys' and girls' unpopularity (arro-
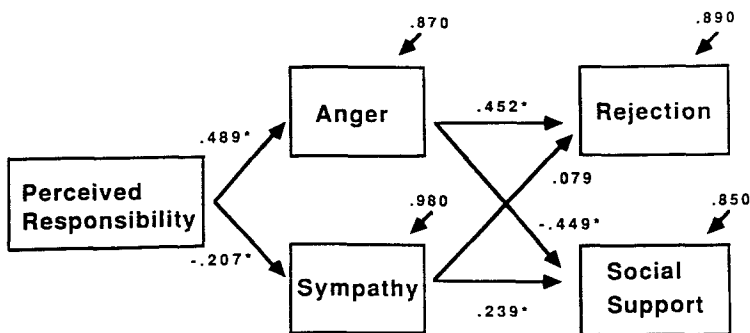

Fig. 1. The relations among perceived responsibility, emotions, and social responses toward deviant classmates (from Juvonen, 1992).

gance, obesity, and shyness) were also experimentally manipulated in the second study by Juvonen (1992). Sixth-grade students' responses to hypothetical peers revealed that perceived responsibility had an independent effect over and above the effect of annoyance on liking and willingness to help. Thus, the data showed that perceptions of responsibility and annoyance can be independently manipulated and that responsibility inferences indeed predict preadolescents' social responses toward their atypical peers.

The above described findings intimate that, whereas perceived responsibility and anger predict active rejection, lack of responsibility and sympathy may explain social neglect. Although the participants reported feeling sympathy toward classmates with disabilities and were willing to help these peers if in need, they did not want to initiate interactions with them or to include them in social activities with other classmates. This pattern of responses suggests that students' interactions also are determined by certain group pressures or motives to protect one's own image and social status.

Is the role of children's responsibility judgments in predicting negative social reactions somewhat limited developmentally? Currently, there are no data on how frequently children, as opposed to adults, engage in spontaneous causal search. However, there is no reason to believe that when confronted with unexpected or negative situations children would not consider the causes of events or others' behavior in an attempt to understand their world (see Weiner, 1986 for a review). Furthermore, the findings of recent attributional studies reveal that, by 6 years of age, children are able to judge whether people are responsible for their actions and recognize the links between responsibility and anger (Graham, Doubleday, and Guarino, 1984; Graham and Weiner, 1986). Thus, based on these findings, the attributional model of negative peer reactions should hold at least for school-age children.

In addition to using an attributional approach to explain the development of rejection or neglect, causal perceptions can be used to examine why negative peer reactions persist over time and are difficult to change. In one investigation pertinent to this issue, children responded to hypothetical scenarios in which actual liked and disliked classmates were depicted to act in ways that had either positive or negative outcomes for the subject (Hymel, 1986). Children reported disliked classmates to be more responsible for the negative behaviors than liked peers. Similarly, Waas and Honer (1991) found that sixth-grade boys tended to attribute conflict situations involving rejected peers to causes internal, stable, and intentional to the rejected peer. Thus, it seems that once a classmate is considered unpopular, the actions of that peer are interpreted in ways that further promote negative reactions and maintain negative expectations, particularly

because of views that the action were carried out intentionally (see also DeLawyer and Foster, 1986; Price and Dodge, 1989; Rogosch and Newcomb, 1989).

Unpopular Children's Perceptions of Their Peers

Similarly to the reactors, the *targets* of rejection and neglect interpret others' behavior in ways that influence their behavior toward these others. If the unpopular peers' interpretations of classmates' behavior are negatively biased (as are the peers' interpretations of unpopular children), then certain response and behavior patterns are likely to reoccur. Dodge (1980, 1983) discovered that many aggressive boys, who are typically rejected by their peers, have an attributional bias to interpret ambiguous negative events (e.g., bumping into one, spilling a drink) as intentional on the part of their peers. Hence, they react with hostility. Waas (1988) found similar attributional biases in nonaggressive as well as aggressive rejected boys. Neglected girls also appear to display such attributional biases (Cirino and Beck, 1991). Thus, it seems that the social experiences of unpopular children partly account for their tendency (a) to perceive others as responsible for threatening situations and (b) to act with hostility toward their peers (see also Rabiner and Coie 1989; Renshaw and Asher, 1983).

To examine whether negative social reactions of children who display a hostile attributional bias can be changed, Graham, Hudley, and Williams (1992) conducted an intervention study with African-American boys identified as aggressive. An attributional intervention was aimed at strengthening the subjects' ability to accurately assess others' responsibility (or lack of responsibility) in social situations through role-playing, discussion of personal experiences, and production of videotaped scenarios portraying accidental, ambiguous, and hostile actions. Pre- and post-intervention measures on perceived responsibility, anger, and aggressive responses to hypothetical social dilemmas were compared among three groups (the experimental attribution training, an attention-training control, and a no intervention control group). The results documented a significant decrease in the intentionality perceptions, anger, and aggressive responses in the attribution training group, compared to the two control conditions. Furthermore, the experimental group showed similar effects (i.e., decrease in perceived responsibility and communicated anger) in a 1-month follow-up study that involved observations of their actual social responses to an interactional frustration task. On this task, children unknowingly conveyed misinformation to a peer so that success at a game was foiled by their communication. This behavior was perceived to be less intentional by the subjects in the

attributional treatment group than in the two control groups. Thus, the data document that it is possible to reduce hostile attributions and hostile responses of aggressive children by changing the way they construe responsibility for social dilemmas.

In addition to examining the aggressive children's attributions, David and Louise Perry and their colleagues found aggressive children's outcome expectancies (e.g., whether aggression yields a desired tangible reward, such as gaining someone's toy) and values (e.g., how bad is it if peers reject oneself) are related to their social behavior (Boldizar, Perry and Perry, 1989; Perry, Perry, and Rasmussen, 1986). For example, Boldizar *et al.* (1989) found that compared to nonaggressive children, aggressive youngsters placed less value on suffering by the victim, retaliation from the victim, and their own social status. Whether these types of social perceptions are causes of aggression or consequences of others' (anticipated) reactions remains to be investigated. It is not surprising if unpopular (e.g., aggressive) children come to expect others to be unfriendly toward themselves after repeated rejection or neglect (Dodge, Asher, and Parkhurst, 1989; Renshaw and Asher, 1983).

In a short-term intervention study, Rabiner and Coie (1989) experimentally manipulated rejected boys' social expectations to examine whether expectancy change might alter their social relationships. The rejected boys in the experimental group were told that previously unfamiliar children, with whom they had a brief chance to play, had liked them and were looking forward to playing with them again. In contrast, the rejected boys in the control group were not told anything about the sentiments or expectations of their play partners. The rejected children in the experimental condition subsequently were preferred over the rejected children in the control condition. This finding suggests that rejected children can make better impressions on peers when they expect these peers to like them. Thus, by manipulating the expectations of the rejected children, Rabiner and Coie (1989) were able to change the reactions of their peers.

Implications for Intervention

Taken together, peer relationship problems such as rejection may be conceptualized as a vicious circle of peers' judgments and negative expectations, social distancing behaviors, and self-fulfilling prophesies that maintain unpopularity over time (Price and Dodge, 1989). The present analysis suggests that classmates' responsibility judgments of one another, their interpretations of classmates' behavior, and their expectations of peers' reactions can in part help us understand some of the motivational aspects

of unpopularity. This motivational approach, contrary to the mainstream and more clinically-oriented approaches, does not focus on the aptitude deficiencies of unpopular children (e.g., lack of social competence) but rather emphasizes the role of children's perceptions of their classmates and, specifically, their judgments of responsibility.

The reviewed research provides new insights for complementing traditional intervention programs. Although many programs have been successful in improving the social skills of unpopular children, that training has not necessarily improved their social status (Gottman, Gonso, and Schueler, 1976; LaGreca and Santogrossi, 1980; Oden and Asher, 1977). These findings intimate that peers are not responsive to the changes in unpopular children's behavior but continue to judge them and interpret their behavior in ways that maintain the negative interactions. Furthermore, the expectations and values of the unpopular peers (i.e., targets of intervention) do not automatically change as a function of a skills intervention approach. Based on our analysis of unpopularity, we suggest that traditional social skills programs need to be complemented with more contextual approaches that address the rejectors' beliefs and perceptions of the unpopular peer as well as the unpopular peers' expectations and values of their behavior and relationships. Specifically, we recommend that professionals simultaneously deal with both the unpopular children's and their peers' perceptions and behavior.

Help Giving in the Classroom

Thus far, we have discussed motivational mechanisms that explain negative social reactions toward classmates. However, given the current emphasis on cooperation and cooperative learning, educators need to also understand how to foster peer support or willingness to help classmates. To investigate the attribution-emotion-behavior links pertinent to helping, Weiner (1980) examined college students' willingness to lend their class notes to a fellow student who had missed a class. The cause or the reason why the classmate had missed the class was either controllable ("went to the beach") or uncontrollable ("had eye problems"). In other words, the controllable cause generated the inference that the help seeker was responsible for missing the class, whereas the uncontrollable cause gave rise to the perception that the other was not responsible for this absence. To increase the believability of the explanations, the classmate was depicted as wearing an eye patch in the eye problem scenario. (The beach explanation, on the other hand, is not an uncommon reason for skipping class in southern California, where the study took place.) The results showed that college

students felt more sympathy and were more willing to lend their class notes to the classmate who was not responsible (eye problem) than to the person who was held responsible (beach) for missing the class. Similar findings have been obtained in other helping studies in which the relations among perceived controllability of the cause of the need, sympathy, and help giving have been examined (Betancourt, 1990; Reisenzein, 1986; Schmidt and Weiner, 1988). These studies also document that sympathy and anger mediate the relation between perceived controllability (responsibility) and willingness to provide or withhold help, as shown in Fig. 2.

Attributional beliefs about responsibility also explain teachers' willingness to provide help or support for their students. Brophy and Rohrkemper (1981) had teachers rate the controllability of various problem behaviors students frequently display (e.g., disruptive behavior, laziness, social withdrawal). In addition, the teachers reported how they would respond to or "manage" such behaviors. Teachers were more likely to provide support to students whose problem behaviors were viewed as uncontrollable by the student (e.g., low self-esteem, shyness) than to those whose problems were seen as controllable by the student (e.g., disruptiveness, laziness).
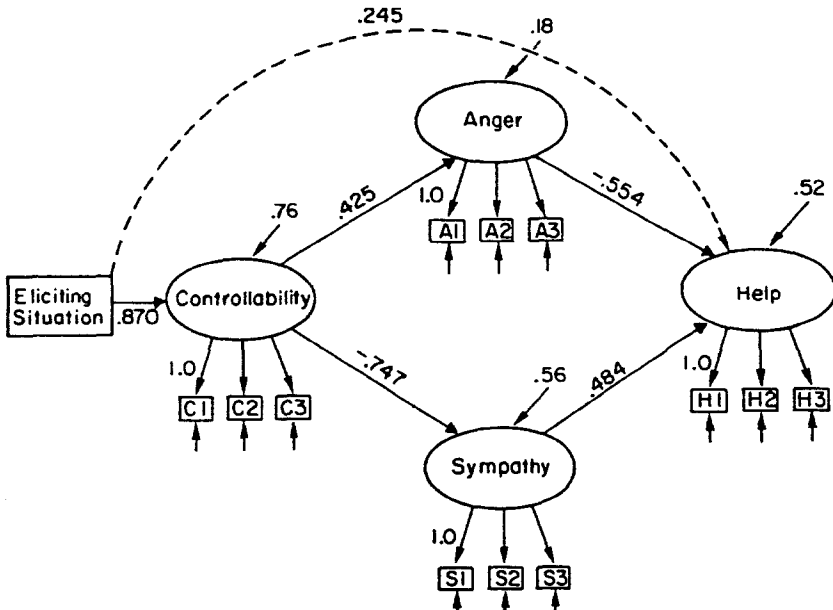

Fig. 2. The relations among the help-eliciting situation, perceived controllability, emotions, and help giving (from Schmidt and Weiner, 1988).

These findings suggest that both teachers and classmates (1) consider and evaluate the reasons why a student needs or wants help, and that (2) perceived controllability and the emotions of sympathy and anger determine whether help is provided. Specifically, uncontrollable problems elicit sympathy, which in turn evokes a positive and supportive response toward a person. Conversely, controllable problems elicit anger and reduce willingness to help. In the context of cooperative learning, this may mean that a fellow student who tries to do her part but because of some uncontrollable problem cannot accomplish the task (e.g., low ability, disability, family problems) is likely to receive the support of the group members. In contrast, a member of the group who is perceived as lazy or as not putting forth effort (a controllable cause) would not be helped or supported by others. This type of analysis of group interactions and students' interpretations of the causes of classmates' needs is a promising direction for researchers interested in the determinants of prosocial behavior and the social dynamics in cooperative-learning groups.

In sum, to understand students' social reactions toward their classmates, the perspective of the reactor must be considered. How then can students avoid others' negative reactions and instead get support from their classmates and teachers? We consider these questions next as we turn from the reactions toward others to ways of manipulating these reactions.

MANIPULATING OTHERS' REACTIONS TOWARD SELF

The cognition-emotion-behavior links described in the prior pages also are part of everyday psychology that guides students' interactions in the classroom. This knowledge helps children to develop impression management or self-presentation tactics that "change their appearances" so they can guide and control others' responses toward them (Weary and Arkin, 1981). An examination of such tactics reveals how students' understanding of responsibility-emotion links enables them to effectively manipulate their classmates' and teachers' reactions to suit their social goals. By providing excuses, children are likely to avoid others' anger and punishment, and by appealing to the values of others they are not only able to avoid negative reactions but also facilitate social approval.

Excuses as Conflict-Management Strategies

When students do things they are not supposed to do (e.g., arrive late to class) or do not do things that they should do (e.g., do not complete

their homework assignments), they are likely to elicit anger from their teachers. Similarly, if students do not follow the rules and norms that define their friendships with classmates (e.g., break their promises or are not trustworthy), then they are likely to be confronted with angry reactions from their peers (Juvonen, 1991b). Conflict situations like these have at least temporary negative social consequences for the transgressor and, in the worst case, the relationship is permanently affected or terminated.

Because most students desire to get along with their teachers and classmates, they try to avoid conflict situations. Obviously, the best strategy to deter conflicts is to prevent negative events from happening. However, in instances when norms or expectations are violated, the transgressor needs to know how to reduce other's anger. For example, a student who breaks a school rule may try to deny the behavior to avoid punishment. Although this strategy may work in some situations, a more common tactic to reduce or eliminate negative social consequences is to deny one's responsibility for the act (Snyder and Higgins, 1988; Snyder, Higgins, and Stucky, 1983; Weiner, Amirkhan, Folkes, and Verette, 1987; Weiner, Figuroa-Munoz, and Kakihara, 1991). After all, a teacher is more likely to be angry at and punish a student if he or she believes that the student did not turn in homework because he watched TV all night (responsible) than if the student is believed "to have gone through some tough times because his parents are getting a divorce," which reduces responsibility because it is considered a mitigating circumstance. Similarly, when a youngster breaks a social contract with a classmate, the classmate is more likely to be angry and less prone to forgive the other if he did not show up because "he had better things to do" (responsible) than if he got sick (not responsible) (Weiner and Handel, 1985).

Given that perceived responsibility for negative events influences others' negative reactions (anger, blame, and disapproval), students learn to manipulate teachers' and classmates' responses by altering their causal explanations for events that could potentially cause conflicts. Thus, in the face of negative events, students deflect personal responsibility by using excuses that reveal the cause of the transgression was uncontrollable by them (e.g., "I was late because my Mom didn't wake me up"). In contrast, students should not readily admit that they were late because of some controllable reason (e.g., "I just didn't feel like getting up"), because this does not reduce personal responsibility.

To investigate developmental differences in children's' understanding of the social consequences of communicating or withholding uncontrollable and controllable causes ("good" and "bad" excuses), Weiner and Handel (1985) had children listen to short stories describing a broken social contract (e.g., "You promised to go to your friend's house to finish up a school

project but never showed up"). The children were then given four control-lable (e.g., "You didn't feel like going") and four uncontrollable causes (e.g., "Your bike got a flat tire on the way to your friend's house") why they did not show up. They were to tell how likely they would reveal or withhold each of the eight reasons. After each reason, children also pre-dicted how angry their friend would be. The results documented that chil-dren in all age groups (5–7, 8–9, and 10–12) perceived that controllable causes elicit more anger than do uncontrollable ones, and children were more likely to withhold the controllable causes over the uncontrollable ones. These findings suggest that by 5–7 years of age children understand the principles of excuse giving.

To study college students' understanding of the affective and social consequences of excuses in situations relevant to everyday experiences, Weiner et al. (1987) conducted an experiment in which a confederate came 15 minutes late to a psychology experiment on "first impressions." Once the confederate (pretending to be the other subject) arrived, he/she com-municated to the waiting subject either an uncontrollable reason ("The pro-fessor in my class gave an exam that ran way over time, and that's why I'm late"), a controllable reason ("I was talking to some friends I ran into in the hall, and that's why I'm late"), or gave no reason for being tardy. To measure "first impressions" after such an initial encounter, subjects rated their affective reactions toward the person who was late (e.g., anger, irritated), traits (e.g., dependable, friendly), and social behaviors (e.g., like-lihood of helping, desire to see again). Consistent with the hypotheses, those giving an uncontrollable excuse were rated more positively and were perceived as having more favorable personality traits than did persons giv-ing the controllable reason or no reason at all.

As suggested above, excuses are part of everyday interactions that make social functioning smooth and that reveal a great deal about the ex-cuse giver. Thus, the study of excuse giving provides insights into children's developing social understanding of implicit norms and the psychological rules that guide their interactions (Schadler and Ayers-Nachamkin, 1983).

Seeking Social Approval

Social approval is an important goal for most students (cf. Baumeis-ter, 1982): that is, they try to "fit in" and act according to the expectations and norms of a desirable peer group or of a person they desire to befriend (Brown, 1989; Eckert, 1989). Whereas young students often want to please their teachers, older students are particularly keen on pleasing their peers. The specific strategies that allow one to appear likable vary depending on

the group that one wishes to please (Jones and Pittman, 1982; Jones and Worthman, 1973; Leary and Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker and Leary, 1982). For example, behaviors that teachers value and reward are likely to be different from behaviors that promote social acceptance in an adolescent peer group. Therefore, students have to "manage" the impressions they give by showing "different faces" to different people in some situations.

As suggested in the previous section on excuses, to reduce others' anger and negative social responses, individuals typically try to deny their responsibility for negative events. But this tactic may vary across different audiences. To examine this issue, Juvonen and Murdock (1993a) conducted an experiment in which adolescent students were to explain to their teachers, parents, and popular peers why they failed or succeeded in an important exam. They were specifically instructed of the need to get along with each of the three audiences. The results showed that students wanted to deny their responsibility for achievement failure when confronted by their teachers and parents (apparently to avoid anger and punishment), but they desired to tell their peers another story. Students were willing to admit to their peers that they failed because they did not study, the very reason they did not want to communicate to their teachers and parents.

Why would students want their peers to believe that they did not study? Given that high effort implies that the task is important to the actor (Brown and Weiner, 1984), lack of effort could be believed to communicate indifference or lack of importance. Because effortful achievement behavior is known to be highly valued by teachers and parents, reports of lack of effort should indicate that the student does not agree or comply with such values. Nonconformity to adult norms and values, in turn, should appeal to peers because adolescents are believed to question traditional school norms and expectations (Coleman, 1961; see also Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Alternatively, by attributing failure to controllable causes, such as lack of effort, students may desire to save face or avoid public humiliation (Covington, 1984). This is especially important given that by adolescence, the relation between effort and ability is perceived as compensatory (Covington and Omelich, 1984; Graham, 1990; Nicholls, 1990). This means that if a student fails in an exam although she has studied for it, she is likely to be perceived as dumb; if she claims that she did not study, she is able to avoid such negative judgments (Covington, 1984).

In addition to the communication of lack of effort (controllable attribution), students' willingness to publicly attribute their poor performance to lack of ability (uncontrollability attribution) was examined in the experiments by Juvonen and Murdock (1993a). The results revealed that, in contrast to the communications to popular peers, students wanted to convey to parents and teachers that they failed because of lack of ability. Although

this finding is inconsistent with some research on impression management, in that individuals are not supposed to present themselves in ways that question their ability or competence (e.g., Covington, 1984; Snyder and Higgins, 1988), from an attributional perspective these results are interpretable. As suggested in the context of help giving, uncontrollability attributions, including lack of ability, elicit sympathy from others (Graham *et al.*, 1984). These data suggest that by attributing failure to low ability and thus eliciting sympathy, students are likely to "disarm" parents and teachers and, instead of punishment, receive a supportive reaction.

Although there is less attribution research on self-presentation tactics regarding positive events, the few studies that deal with praise suggest that social approval, just as social blame, depends on perceived responsibility. For example, in an earlier attributional experiment, Weiner and Kukla (1970) found that praise was maximized when teachers perceived students to be responsible for a successful exam outcome (put forth high effort). This finding suggests that to maximize praise (or social approval) in successful achievement situations one should appear effortful. Consistent with this hypothesis, Jagacinski and Nicholls (1990) report that when college students were instructed to "impress" a hypothetical instructor, they preferred to convey that they worked hard as opposed to creating the impression that they did not need to work hard because of high ability. Taken together, attributional research suggests that people can elicit favorable reactions from others by assuming responsibility for positive events.

In the experiments by Juvonen and Murdock (1993a), eighth-graders' self-presentation tactics across different audiences were also explored after successful achievement events. As was true of the failure results, the data revealed that although students recognize that success due to a controllable cause (e.g., effort) elicits positive responses from adults or authority figures, they modify this strategy for their peers. Although adolescents recognize that diligence elicits praise from a superior (Pandey, 1981, 1986; Reis and Gruzen, 1976), such statements can be construed by peers as a sign of competitiveness. Competition, in turn, violates one of the basic premises of positive peer relationships, namely, equality (e.g., Berndt, 1988). Also, students may realize that when one of them works hard and succeeds, teachers' general expectations are raised and, more importantly, by "setting the curve" the student makes others look worse than before (cf. Slavin, 1983). Students' awareness of implicit but shared peer norms and their understanding of the implications of breaking such norms are relatively unexplored areas that would help us further explain students' classroom interactions (cf. Morine-Dershimer, 1983; Newman and Goldin, 1990).

Taken together, the results of these experiments suggest that students recognize the different values and relationship expectations of their audiences

and modify their explanations of positive and negative events accordingly (Baumeister, 1982; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Thus, in contrast to the rather simple principle of excuse giving (i.e., reducing responsibility to avoid anger), the strategies for seeking social approval are more sophisticated.

It is important to further examine students' understanding of impression-management tactics because some youngsters who first adopt strategies to please their peers (e.g., deny that they study) may internalize this value (cf. McKillop, Berzonski, and Schlenker, 1992; Schlenker, 1980). In other words, students may not only claim that they do not study but, in the worst case, also reduce their actual achievement efforts. Thus, to be academically and socially successful in school, students need to navigate among conflicting motives when peer-group norms are opposed to traditional school values.

In sum, students' social strategies to seek approval and avoid conflicts provide important information about their social understanding. An interesting question for future research is to investigate the development of impression-management concerns and strategies (Juvonen and Murdock, 1993b). School settings provide children with opportunities to compare themselves with others in respect to likability and the number of friends. Such comparisons, in turn, heighten their awareness of and concerns about being included and accepted. Strategies, on the other hand, are likely to develop with the guidance of a "more knowledgeable other" (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; Wertch, 1985). Schadler and Ayers-Nachamkin (1983), for example, describe instances of parents or teachers coaching young children in excuse giving.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the social consequences of perceived responsibility presented in this review was guided by principles of attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1986), which suggest specific links between thought, emotion, and action. Specifically, we examined (1) how students' judgments of responsibility of others and social expectations influence their emotional reactions and social interactions with these others, and (2) how students' understanding of the relations among perceived responsibility, emotions, expectations, and anticipated values of others impacts their self-presentation strategies. Rather than trying to cover a wide range of motivational approaches, our goal was to demonstrate how a single set of constructs can explain a variety of social phenomena.

This paper, together with Graham's (1991) review on achievement attributions, demonstrates how achievement and affiliation, the two fundamental areas of motivation, fit under the same theoretical umbrella of attribution theory. Although many social behaviors, such as the ones covered here, can

be explained by focusing on students' perceptions of causal controllability, the examination of other causal properties (e.g., locus and stability) depicted in Graham's article would further enhance our understanding of affiliation in schools. For example, Graham showed how locus of causality is central to students' self-esteem and feelings of pride, whereas the perceived stability of causes is related to expectancy change. Obviously, self-esteem, pride, and expectancy change also are relevant to the analysis of affiliation. This is another area of attributional research that awaits exploration.

Although an attributional analysis provides one avenue to examine social interactions, we do not suggest that it is the only approach. For example, a few researchers have successfully applied goal theory to the study of children's social behaviors (Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Wentzel, 1989, 1991). Analyzing students' social interactions via motivational approaches is likely to shed new light on phenomena that often are more narrowly thought to be rooted in actors' personalities or dependent on their competencies. Furthermore, a motivational approach provides an alternative perspective on intervention. As was suggested in the analysis of social rejection and neglect, biased causal beliefs (perceived intentionality for negative events) of others' behavior can be altered, and by doing that, the perceiver's emotional reactions (anger) and behaviors (aggression) toward others can be changed (Graham and Hudley, 1992).

Last but not least, one of our goals for this review was to make a plea for researchers to broaden the scope of educational psychology to include the study of social or affiliative behavior in school settings. We believe that educational psychologists have concentrated too narrowly on achievement and academic behaviors, thereby neglecting the impact of the social context on students' classroom behavior (cf. Goodenow, 1992). When Csikszentmihalyi (1991) sampled high school students' thoughts and emotions during class hours using a paging device, only a fraction of the students reported attending to the topic of the lesson. Similarly, when students are asked why they come to school or what is most fun in school, many of them reply with one word: "Friends!" Thus, it appears that researchers are studying a phenomenon (i.e., academic learning and achievement) that students consider secondary to schooling.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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