

# Intuitions About Situational Correction in Self and Others

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People's attributional phenomenology is likely to be characterized by effortful situational correction. Drawing on this phenomenology and on people's desire to view themselves more favorably than others, the authors hypothesized that people expect others to engage in less situational correction than themselves and to make more extreme dispositional attributions for constrained actors' behavior. In 2 studies, people expected their peers to make more extreme dispositional inferences than they did themselves for a situationally constrained actor's behavior. People's expectation that they engage in more situational correction than their peers was diminished among Japanese participants, who have less desire to view themselves as superior to their peers (Study 3), and among participants who were led to view dispositional attributions more favorably than situational attributions (Study 4).

Dual-process models have occupied the center stage of recent psychological theorizing. A host of important psychological phenomena have been attributed to the combined effect of a quick, automatic computation and a slower, consciously controlled correction mechanism (see Chaiken & Trope, 1999). Among the most prominent in social psychology are dual-process accounts of the correspondence bias (Gilbert, 1989, 2002; Quattrone, 1982; Trope, 1986; Uleman, 1987; Winter & Uleman, 1984). Observers automatically categorize and characterize an actor performing a behavior in terms of the traits implied by that behavior. The initial characterization is then effortfully corrected to account for prevailing situational constraints or inducements. Because this correction is often insufficient (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), the link or "unit" between the person and his or her behavior is drawn too tightly, resulting in overly dispositional inferences.

Differences in how these automatic and controlled processes are experienced by people performing them may have important implications for individuals' metacognitive understanding of their own and other people's attributional processes. The phenomenology of forming impressions of other people is likely to be dominated by the slower, more effortful, and consciously mediated correction process, not the initial, more rapid, and automatic cat-

egorization and characterization process. Because situational correction is relatively effortful, people may feel that they have taken careful, prudent, and well-reasoned "extra steps" to render an accurate causal analysis. People may therefore believe that they have given appropriate weight to situational influences even when they have committed the fundamental attribution error, or correspondence bias (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Jones, 1979, 1990; Ross, 1977).

We hypothesized that people's metacognitive awareness of situational correction is accompanied by the belief that they engage in more corrective efforts than other people and that others are therefore more prone to the correspondence bias than they are themselves. This follows from the simple fact that individuals have direct access to their own but not others' corrective efforts. It also follows from people's well-documented desire to believe they outrank or outperform their peers on most traits, abilities, and other desirable characteristics (e.g., Alicke, 1985; Brown, 1986; Campbell, 1986; Dunning, 1999; Dunning & Hayes, 1996; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Accurate perceptions of the social world are presumably more desirable than inaccurate perceptions. People may therefore believe that they engage in more situational correction and hence make less pronounced dispositional attributions for constrained actors' behavior than their peers.

Two lines of research have provided indirect evidence for this analysis. First, several investigators have shown that people generally believe they are less prone to biased social judgments than others are (Armor, 1999; Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2003; Pronin, Ross, & Lin, 2002). If situational correction is viewed as a means to accurate social judgments, then people may likewise believe that they engage in more situational correction than others do.

Second, research from our own laboratory has established that people underestimate other people's situational correction. We found that when people know they have been observed engaging in situationally constrained behavior, they overestimate the extremity of observers' dispositional inferences about them (Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001; Van Boven, Kamada, & Gilovich, 1999; see

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This research was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant awarded to Leaf Van Boven, by an SSHRC doctoral fellowship awarded to Katherine White, and by National Science Foundation Grant SBR9319558 awarded to Thomas Gilovich.

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also Miller, Baer, & Schonberg, 1979). In one study, people who were assigned the role of contestant in a quiz show, whose performance was constrained by the disadvantageous position of being tested on another person's idiosyncratic repertoire of trivia (Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977), overestimated how harshly others would judge them (Savitsky et al., 2001, Study 3).

We have also shown that people overestimate the extremity of observers' dispositional attributions when the person being evaluated is an actor other than the self. People who witnessed an observer directing an actor to answer questions in either an altruistic or a selfish manner, for example, overestimated the extremity of observers' inferences about the actor's true personality (Van Boven et al., 1999, Study 3a). We attributed these findings to people's belief that other people are inveterate dispositionalists who leap too quickly from acts to dispositions with little correction for situational constraints—a belief implying that people's own attributions are less rash and correct more for situational constraints.

### The Present Research

We sought to expand previous research in two ways. First, we directly examined whether people expect others to engage in less situational correction than they do themselves. Second, we examined whether people's intuitions that others engage in less situational correction is partially caused by people's desire to view themselves as superior person perceivers.

Both possibilities rest on the assumption that people's own attributional phenomenology involves having exerted effort at situational correction. To establish an important precondition of our core hypotheses, we sought to ascertain whether people are indeed cognizant of their own corrective efforts. We asked 48 University of British Columbia (UBC) undergraduates to read an essay ostensibly written by a fellow student that argued, at the behest of an experimenter, that Canada should withdraw its troops from the U.S.-led military coalition in Afghanistan. After estimating the writer's true attitude toward Canada's military involvement (87% thought the writer was opposed to Canada's participation),<sup>1</sup> participants were presented, in counterbalanced order, with descriptions of five distinct attributional strategies and asked to indicate which ones described how they personally estimated the essayist's true attitude. Consistent with our thesis, a strong majority of respondents (70%; 95% confidence interval [CI] = 56%–83%) indicated that they

started from an initial impression based on the strength of the opinion expressed in the essay, and then moderated or adjusted my sense of the writer's true attitudes because I knew that he or she was asked by the experimenter to express that particular opinion.<sup>2</sup>

Most participants, clearly, were aware of their own corrective efforts.

Having established that people are indeed aware of their own corrective efforts, we turn now to the core questions of this research. We first asked people to report their own explanations and to predict their peers' explanations for actors' behavior that had received considerable media attention (Study 1). In more tightly controlled laboratory conditions, we then examined people's own explanations and their predictions of their peers' explanations for an actor's behavior that was explicitly constrained by

the experimenter's instructions (Study 2). We predicted that people in both studies would expect their peers' explanations to emphasize situational factors less—and hence be more dispositional—than their own explanations.

In our second pair of studies, we examined the motivational underpinnings of people's intuitions regarding situational correction in themselves and others. In Study 3, we asked people to predict how much situational correction they would engage in if they were an observer in an attributional study patterned after Jones and Harris's (1967) classic paradigm and to estimate how much situational correction the actual observers in that study engaged in. We expected that individuals in Western cultures, who tend to view themselves as above average, would expect to engage in more situational correction than their peers. We further expected that this tendency would be diminished among individuals in East Asian cultures, who are less prone to view themselves as above average (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Finally, in Study 4 we examined whether people's tendency to expect less situational correction in others than in themselves would be diminished when they were led to view dispositional attributions more favorably than situational attributions.

### Study 1

We first wished to assess people's explanations for behavior that took place outside the confines of the laboratory. We approached people in a university commons area and asked them about their own attributions and to estimate their peers' attributions for the Columbine tragedy, in which high school seniors Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot and killed 12 of their fellow students and one teacher before committing suicide. The event received considerable media attention, and many of the public explanations cited the importance of various situational factors such as readily available guns, inadequacies within the family, and intense bullying. We reminded respondents of the details of the event, and asked them to assign responsibility to various factors, some of which pertained to the two boys' dispositions (e.g., being cruel and hateful) and some of which pertained to situational influences (e.g., inadequacies within the family). We asked respondents to rate how much they thought each factor contributed to the shooting and to predict how much responsibility their classmates would assign to the same dispositional and situational factors. We predicted that respondents would expect their peers to emphasize dispositional factors more than they did themselves.

<sup>1</sup> The study was conducted in May 2002, shortly after U.S. "friendly fire" killed four and injured eight Canadian soldiers, arousing some anti-U.S. sentiment among Canadian university students.

<sup>2</sup> Participants were less apt to report having engaged in the four other processes: starting with an initial inference that the author did not have an attitude one way or another, and then adjusting that inference because the essay seemed more extreme than one that a person with neutral attitudes would write (43%, 95% CI = 29%–59%); going with their "gut feeling" without giving it much conscious deliberation (45%, 95% CI = 30%–60%); comparing the attitude expressed in the essay with participants' own attitudes (55%, 95% CI = 39%–69%); and comparing the attitude expressed in the essay with what participants believed the average UBC student believes (22%, 95% CI = 12%–37%).

## Method

Approximately 1 week after the April 20, 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, a research assistant approached Cornell University students outside the campus bookstore and offered them \$2 in exchange for completing a brief questionnaire. Respondents ( $N = 33$ ; approximately two thirds of those initially approached) were given a brief summary of the events: Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot and killed 12 of their fellow high school students and one teacher before committing suicide.

Respondents were asked to rate how much they thought four factors contributed to the shooting. Two of the factors concerned the dispositions of the two boys: the boys' "cruel and hateful" personalities and the boys' "evil" natures. Two other factors concerned external elements that might have led to the boys' actions: "inadequacies within the boys' families" and the boys having been "ostracized and harassed by fellow students." Participants rated how much each factor contributed to the shooting on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 9 (*a great deal*).

Respondents were also asked to estimate how their classmates would rate the causal role played by each of the same four factors (on identical 10-point scales). The order in which respondents indicated their own attributions and estimated their peers' attributions was counterbalanced, and there was no effect of order on our results.

## Results and Discussion

Respondents' ratings of the causal role of the two dispositional factors were averaged into a composite measure,  $r(31) = .83$ ,  $p < .001$ , as were their ratings of the causal role of the two situational factors,  $r(31) = .71$ ,  $p < .001$ . Respondents' ratings of the causal role their peers would assign to the two dispositional factors and to the two situational factors were also averaged into two composite measures,  $r_s(31) = .67$  and  $.48$ , respectively, both  $ps < .01$ .

We examined our prediction that respondents would expect their peers to emphasize dispositional factors relatively more than they did themselves by submitting the four indices to a 2 (causal factor: dispositional vs. situational)  $\times$  2 (target: self vs. peers) repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). This analysis yielded the predicted interaction,  $F(1, 32) = 13.22$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Figure 1). Although respondents indicated that they emphasized situational factors significantly more than dispositional factors,  $t(32) = 4.06$ ,  $p < .001$  (the left side of Figure 1), they did not expect their peers

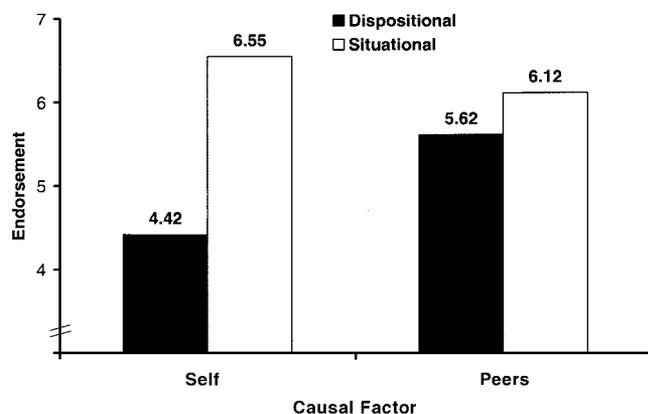


Figure 1. Participants' endorsement of dispositional and situational causes of the Columbine tragedy and their estimates of their peers' endorsement of those causes.

to emphasize situational factors significantly more than dispositional factors,  $t(32) = 1.14$ , *ns* (the right side of Figure 1). It appears that people expect others to assign relatively more weight to dispositional factors than they do themselves.

That respondents indicated they emphasized situational factors more than dispositional factors may seem inconsistent with the literature on the fundamental attribution error, which shows that people often make overly dispositional inferences for people's behavior. However, because we do not know the true causal role played by Harris's and Klebold's dispositions versus the situations they encountered, we also do not know whether respondents in our study placed too much or too little emphasis on dispositions versus situations. The point is that respondents expected their peers to place relatively less emphasis on situational factors than respondents had themselves.

## Study 2

We designed Study 2 to examine people's intuitions about their peers' attributional processes relative to their own in a more controlled laboratory situation. We asked participants to watch a videotaped speech on a controversial topic delivered by another student, to infer the speaker's true attitudes concerning the topic, and to predict their peers' attitude inferences.

To allow a more detailed analysis of people's intuitions about their peers' attributional processes, we told participants that the topic of the speech was either freely chosen by the speaker or was assigned by the experimenter. In keeping with prior findings (Jones & Harris, 1967) and with a normative attribution analysis (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967, 1971), we expected participants who believed the experimenter assigned the topic of the speech to engage in situational correction and thus make less extreme dispositional inferences than participants who believed the speaker had freely chosen the topic. More important, we predicted that participants would expect their peers to engage in less situational correction than they did themselves. That is, we predicted that participants who believed the experimenter had assigned the topic of the speech would expect their peers to make more pronounced dispositional inferences than they did themselves.

The inclusion of a condition in which the speaker freely chose the topic of the speech allows us to differentiate two explanations for people's expectations that their peers' attributions emphasize dispositional factors more than their own. One is that people believe that others are "dispositional extremists," making dispositional inferences that are always more extreme than their own; thus, whatever causal role people assign to an actor's dispositions, they believe that others assign a greater causal role. If so, participants in both the constrained- and free-choice conditions should expect their peers to make more extreme attitude inferences than themselves. The second explanation is the one we articulated earlier: People believe that they engage in more situational correction for initial, automatic dispositional characterizations of constrained actors' behavior than their peers do. Participants in the constrained-choice condition should therefore expect their peers to make more extreme attitude inferences than they do themselves, whereas participants in the free-choice condition—who presumably do not engage in situational correction—should not.

## Method

Eighty Cornell University undergraduates arrived at the lab in previously unacquainted groups of 2 to 6. They were told that they would watch a videotape of another Cornell student from an earlier study delivering a speech about whether colleges and universities should use affirmative action policies in their admissions decisions. Participants' task was to estimate the speaker's true attitudes toward affirmative action and to predict the attitude inferences made by another participant in the group.

Participants were provided with the consent form and instructions that had ostensibly been given to the speaker beforehand. For participants randomly assigned to the free-choice condition ( $n = 40$ ), these materials made it clear that the speaker freely chose to write and deliver a speech that supported or opposed affirmative action. For participants in the constrained-choice condition, the materials made it clear that the experimenter had assigned the topic of the speech.

Crossed with the choice manipulation, participants randomly assigned to the pro-affirmative-action condition ( $n = 40$ ) watched a videotape in which the speaker delivered a speech supporting affirmative action policies; participants in the anti-affirmative-action condition watched the speaker deliver a speech opposing affirmative action. The two speeches were from participants in Study 1 of Van Boven et al. (1999) who had been asked to write and deliver a speech that was at odds with their true attitudes toward affirmative action. Both speeches were thus composed and delivered under constrained-choice conditions.

After watching the videotaped speech, participants were escorted to a private room and asked to estimate the speaker's true attitudes toward affirmative action by answering three questions, each on a scale ranging from  $-4$  (*opposes very much*) to  $0$  (*neither opposes nor supports*) to  $+4$  (*supports very much*). The questions were (a) "How much do you think the speaker supports affirmative action generally?"; (b) "How much do you think the speaker supports affirmative action laws for hiring minority and women individuals?"; and (c) "How much do you think the speaker supports the use of affirmative action policies in colleges' and universities' admissions decisions?" Participants also predicted the attitude inferences of another randomly selected participant in their group whose identity they did not know. They were asked to estimate, as accurately as possible, how that participant would respond to the same three questions. The questions pertaining to the self and the questions pertaining to the other participant were answered in counterbalanced order, which did not affect any of our results.

## Results

Participants' three inferences about the speaker's true attitude toward affirmative action and their three predictions of the other participant's attitude inferences were averaged to create two separate composite variables ( $\alpha = .96$  and  $.97$ , respectively). One participant from the constrained-choice condition who watched a pro-affirmative-action speech was excluded from all analyses because her attitude inference, as represented by the composite measure, was more than 3 standard deviations from the condition mean.

We predicted that participants who believed that the speaker's behavior was constrained would expect their peers to make dispositional inferences that were more extreme than participants' own inferences. When participants believed that the speaker had freely chosen the topic of the speech, in contrast, we predicted that participants would expect their peers to make inferences similar to their own. We examined this prediction by conducting a  $2$  (choice: free vs. constrained)  $\times 2$  (speech: pro- vs. anti-affirmative action)  $\times 2$  (target: self vs. peers) mixed-model ANOVA, which yielded the anticipated three-way interaction,  $F(1, 75) = 5.98, p = .017$  (see Figure 2).

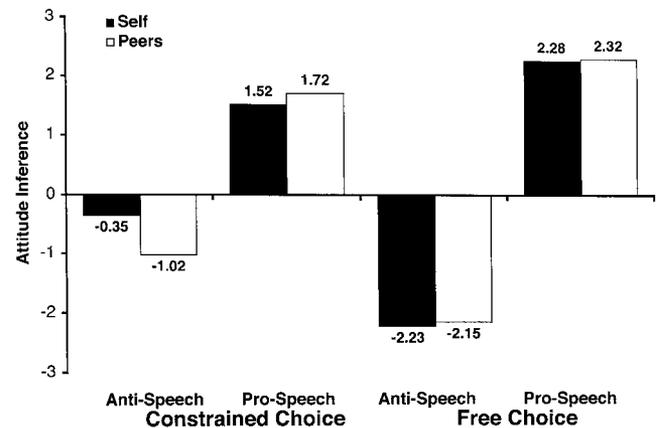


Figure 2. Participants' own inferences and their estimates of their peers' inferences about a speaker's true attitude toward affirmative action after viewing an anti- or pro-affirmative-action speech and learning that the topic had been selected by the experimenter (constrained choice) or by the speaker (free choice).

Participants who believed the speaker's choice had been constrained expected their peers to make more extreme dispositional inferences than they had themselves, as indicated by a significant interaction in a  $2$  (speech: pro- vs. anti-affirmative action)  $\times 2$  (target: self vs. peers) mixed-model ANOVA,  $F(1, 75) = 10.56, p = .002$  (compare the difference between the black with the difference between the white bars on the left side of Figure 2). Although participants exhibited a correspondence bias, inferring that the speaker's attitudes corresponded to the topic of the speech,  $t(37) = 4.46, p < .001$ , they expected their peers to exhibit an even larger correspondence bias,  $t(37) = 7.07, p < .001$ .

When observing an unconstrained speaker, in contrast, participants did not perceive any difference between their own and their peers' inferences. A  $2$  (speech: pro- vs. anti-affirmative action)  $\times 2$  (target: self vs. peers) mixed-model ANOVA yielded no hint of an interaction ( $F < 1$ ; compare the difference between the black bars with the difference between the white bars on the right side of Figure 2). Participants expected their peers to make correspondent inferences,  $t(38) = 13.03$ , that paralleled their own inferences,  $t(38) = 14.31$ , both  $ps < .001$ .

## Discussion

The results of Study 2 provide a conceptual replication of the first study in a different domain and within a more controlled laboratory situation. Participants predicted that their peers would make inferences that emphasized the actor's dispositions more than they did themselves but only when participants believed that the actor's behavior had been constrained by the experimenter's instructions. These findings rule out the possibility that people believe others always make more extreme dispositional inferences than they do themselves.

## Study 3

We have suggested that people expect their peers to make more extreme dispositional inferences than they do themselves because

they believe that others engage in less situational correction than they do. The results of the first two studies, particularly those of Study 2, support this contention. Alternative explanations are possible, however. People may believe, for example, that they notice situational constraints more than their peers, not that, once noticed, they are more likely to use those constraints as a basis for correcting initial dispositional attributions.

With this in mind, we designed Study 3 to directly examine people's intuitions about situational correction in themselves and other people. We did this by providing participants with a description of an experiment in which an experimenter had asked someone to deliver a speech on a controversial topic (abortion, the death penalty, or euthanasia) that was at odds with the speaker's true attitudes on that topic. Participants were told that observers of the speech had been asked to estimate the speaker's true attitude regarding the topic of the speech and that observers were well aware that the topic had been assigned by the experimenter. We pointed out the inferential dilemma observers faced: They may have been tempted to take the speaker's behavior at face value, inferring that the speaker truly endorsed the topic of the speech; however, observers also realized that the experimenter had assigned the topic, so they may have corrected, or moderated, their initial impression to account for this situational constraint.

Participants were asked to imagine that they had been an observer in this experiment and to predict how much they would have moderated their initial impression to correct for situational constraints. Participants were also asked to consider the attributions made by the observers who were actually in the experiment (ostensibly students at their university) and to predict how much those observers moderated their initial impressions. We predicted that participants would expect their peers to correct their initial attributions less than they would themselves.

More precisely, we made this prediction for half of our participants. A second purpose of Study 3 was to examine our claim that people expect their peers to engage in less situational correction than they do themselves partly because they view such correction as desirable, and they wish to see themselves as superior person perceivers. This logic suggests that individuals who have less desire to view themselves as superior person perceivers should be correspondingly less likely to view themselves as engaging in more situational correction than their peers. Accordingly, we conducted Study 3 with two samples. One consisted of people residing in a Western, individualistic culture (the United States), who by most accounts have a strong desire to view themselves more favorably than their peers (e.g., Alicke, 1985; Brown, 1986; Campbell, 1986; Dunning, 1999). We expected these participants to anticipate less situational correction on the part of their peers than themselves. The second sample consisted of people residing in an East Asian, collectivist culture (Japan), who by most accounts have less desire than their American counterparts to view themselves more favorably than their peers (Heine et al., 1999; Heine & Lehman, 1997; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). Assuming that Japanese are less motivated to view themselves more favorably than their peers, we expected them to be less likely than Americans to expect their peers to engage in less situational correction than themselves.

## Method

One hundred twenty Cornell University students participated in exchange for extra credit in psychology and human development courses. One hundred twenty Nihon University students participated in exchange for a small gift worth approximately \$2.

Participants were asked to read a description of a "typical" attribution study (patterned after Jones & Harris, 1967) in which students at their university had been asked to write and deliver a speech on one of three controversial topics: abortion, euthanasia, or the death penalty. Pilot testing in both countries indicated that these topics were mildly controversial and that students were likely to be familiar with the arguments on either side of these issues.

Participants read that as is sometimes done in attribution studies, the speaker was asked to write and deliver a speech that was at odds with his or her true attitudes toward the topic. Participants read that each speech was videotaped and later shown to observers who were asked to infer the speaker's true attitudes. To aid observers in this task, participants were told that the observers were provided with a written copy of the speaker's instructions, which made it clear that the experimenter had assigned the topic of the speech.

Participants were then told that observers might have faced a difficult attributional dilemma when trying to infer the speaker's true attitudes. On the one hand, they saw the speaker deliver a speech that was most likely well written and well delivered. Observers therefore may have been initially inclined to think that the speaker truly believed the arguments he or she espoused. On the other hand, observers knew that the experimenter assigned the topic of the speech, so they may have been inclined to moderate, or correct, their initial impression that the speaker truly believed the espoused arguments.

Having highlighted this attributional dilemma, we asked participants to predict how much they would have moderated their initial impression of the speaker's true attitudes if they had been an observer in the experiment. They made this prediction on a scale ranging from 0 (*moderate not at all*) to 9 (*moderate a great deal*). Participants were also asked to consider the attributions made by the actual observers in the experiment and to predict how much the observers moderated their initial impressions of the speaker's true attitudes on an identical scale. The order in which participants predicted their own versus the observers' moderation was counterbalanced, and there was no effect of order on any of our results.

To ensure that the descriptions and dependent measures were accurately translated, a native Japanese speaker residing in Japan first translated all materials from English to Japanese. A native English speaker, also residing in Japan, then translated the Japanese version back into English. Inconsistencies between the original English version and the back-translated English version were resolved by discussion between Leaf Van Boven and the two translators (cf. Brislin, 1970).

## Results

Two participants from the United States did not complete the measure regarding their own correction and thus were excluded from all analyses (resulting  $N = 238$ ).

*U.S. participants.* We predicted that participants in the Western, individualistic, and self-enhancing United States would expect their peers to have engaged in less situational correction than they would have themselves. We thus conducted a 3 (topic: abortion vs. euthanasia vs. death penalty)  $\times$  2 (target: self vs. other) mixed-model ANOVA on their moderation predictions. As expected, American participants predicted that their peers engaged in less situational correction ( $M = 4.64$ ) than they would have themselves ( $M = 5.72$ ),  $F(1, 115) = 21.56, p < .001$  (see the left side of Figure 3). The interaction was not significant ( $F < 1$ ). This

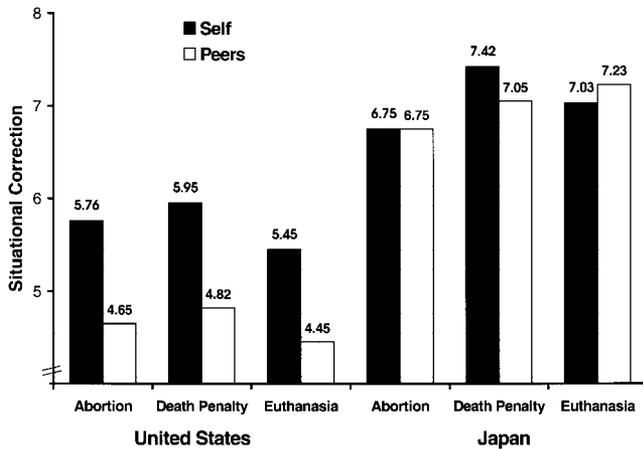


Figure 3. Ratings made by participants in the United States and Japan of how much they would moderate their initial dispositional inferences about a constrained actors' behavior and how much other observers would moderate their initial impressions.

predicted difference in anticipated situational correction between self and others emerged for each topic (all simple effect  $t_s > 2.4$ , all  $p_s < .025$ ).

*Japanese participants.* We anticipated that the Japanese participants would not expect their peers to have engaged in less situational correction than they would have themselves. Consistent with our prediction, Japanese participants thought that their peers engaged in approximately the same amount of situational correction ( $M = 7.01$ ) as they themselves would have ( $M = 7.07$ ; see the right side of Figure 3). A 3 (topic: abortion vs. euthanasia vs. death penalty)  $\times$  2 (target: self vs. other) mixed-model ANOVA yielded no hint of a main effect of target ( $F < 1$ ), and the interaction was not significant,  $F(2, 117) = 1.56, ns$ . For none of the three topics did the Japanese participants predict they would have engaged in significantly more situational correction than their peers did ( $t_s < 1.45$ , all  $ns$ ).

*Comparisons of U.S. and Japanese participants.* Were American participants significantly more likely than the Japanese participants to expect their peers to have engaged in less situational correction than they would have themselves? A 2 (culture: United States vs. Japan)  $\times$  2 (target: self vs. other)  $\times$  3 (topic: abortion vs. euthanasia vs. death penalty) mixed-model ANOVA yielded the anticipated two-way interaction between culture and target,  $F(1, 232) = 14.22, p < .001$ . Compared with the Japanese, U.S. participants were significantly more likely to predict that their peers would have engaged in less situational correction than they themselves would have. This finding is consistent with the possibility that situational correction is viewed as desirable and that Japanese are less motivated to view themselves more favorably than their peers.

Inspection of Figure 3 reveals an additional difference between U.S. and Japanese participants that warrants discussion. Japanese participants predicted that they would have engaged in more situational correction than did U.S. participants,  $F(1, 237) = 26.50, p < .001$ . Japanese participants also predicted that their peers corrected more than American participants predicted their peers did,  $F(1, 237) = 63.49, p < .001$ . These results are

consistent with previous findings that East Asians are less prone to the correspondence bias than Americans because East Asians are more likely to engage in situational correction (e.g., Choi & Nisbett, 1998; for a review, see Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). To our knowledge, however, these results are the first evidence that East Asians' intuitions about their own and their peers' attributional processes emphasize situational correction more than do Americans' intuitions.

### Discussion

The results of Study 3 complement and extend those of Studies 1 and 2 in two ways. First, the responses of American participants indicated that when explaining a constrained actor's behavior, they believed that their peers were less likely than they were themselves to engage in an effortful process of situational correction. Combined with the results of the first two studies, these data indicate that people (in individualistic cultures) believe that they engage in more careful and accurate attributional analysis than their peers, and this may lead them to overestimate the extremity of their peers' dispositional inferences for a situationally constrained actor's behavior.

Second, there was no evidence of such a belief among Japanese participants, who expected that they would engage in approximately the same degree of situational correction as their peers. This cultural difference is consistent with our suggestion that Americans' belief that they engage in greater situational correction than others stems from their desire to view themselves as superior person perceivers. Given the existing evidence of diminished self-enhancement tendencies among East Asians (Heine et al., 1999; Heine & Lehman, 1997), the Japanese participants were presumably less motivated to view themselves as superior person perceivers and were thus less likely to believe that they would engage in more situational correction than their peers. Of course, Americans and Japanese differ in many ways in addition to the desire to view themselves more favorably than their peers. We thus sought to provide more direct evidence that motivational considerations partly underlie Westerners' belief that their peers engage in less situational correction than they do themselves.

### Study 4

We contend that people expect their peers to engage in less situational correction than they do themselves partly because they desire to view themselves favorably. For most people, presumably, situational correction is seen as desirable because it is a component of a full, balanced, and nuanced view of the behavior in question, and who would want to be someone who would endorse incomplete, unbalanced, or simple-minded views? Consistent with this analysis, Japanese participants in Study 3—who arguably viewed situational correction as desirable but had less desire to see themselves as superior person perceivers—did not expect to engage in more situational correction than their peers.

We subjected this interpretation to a different test in Study 4 by manipulating the perceived desirability of a tendency to make situational versus dispositional attributions. Borrowing a procedure from Kunda and colleagues (Kunda & Sanitioso, 1989; Sanitioso, Kunda, & Fong, 1990), we told some participants that a tendency to make situational attributions conferred significant

advantages in life and told others that a tendency to make dispositional attributions conferred life advantages. Then, as part of an ostensibly independent investigation, we described to participants an attribution experiment in which observers witnessed an actor's behavior that had been constrained by the experimenter. As in Study 3, we asked them to predict how much they would have engaged in situational correction if they had been in the experiment and to predict how much their peers (the actual observers in the experiment) engaged in situational correction. We predicted that participants who were led to believe that situational attributions conferred life benefits would, like the self-serving Americans in Study 3, expect their peers to have engaged in less correction than they would have themselves. We predicted that this expectation of less situational correction by one's peers would be diminished, or even reversed, among participants who were led to believe that dispositional attributions conferred life benefits.

### Method

Forty-six UBC students participated in exchange for extra credit in their introductory marketing course. On arrival at the laboratory, participants were given a brief "research article" ostensibly from *Psychology Today*, a source UBC students viewed as reliable in pilot testing. The article stated that researchers at Cornell University, a prestigious research institution, had examined the relationship between different explanatory styles and life outcomes and found that the way individuals tend to explain others' behavior confers different benefits in life. Participants randomly assigned to the dispositional-benefits condition ( $n = 23$ ) read that the benefit-conferring explanatory style emphasized dispositional factors; those in the situational-benefits condition read that the benefit-conferring explanatory style emphasized situational factors. Specifically, participants read that "researchers had followed people over 5 years and found that those who explained behavior in terms of a person's dispositions [situational factors] rather than situational factors [a person's dispositions]" experienced specific life advantages such as attaining higher education, higher income, and greater satisfaction with life. After reading the article, participants were asked to explain in their own words why having a dispositional [situational] explanatory style facilitates the attainment of positive life outcomes.

Participants then completed unrelated personality questionnaires for approximately 15 min, after which they were told that the main experiment was finished. The experimenter then asked participants if they would be willing (all were) to complete an unrelated questionnaire for another researcher from a different psychology department. Participants read a description of an attribution experiment similar to that described in Study 3. Specifically, they read about a study in which students had been asked to write and deliver a counterattitudinal speech opposing the legalization of marijuana for recreational use (legalization being a topical and widely supported stance at UBC). Participants read that each speech was videotaped and later shown to observers (also UBC students) who were asked to infer the speaker's true attitudes toward legalization. Participants read that observers had been given copies of the speaker's written instructions and thus were well aware of the speaker's situational constraints.

We outlined the attributional dilemma faced by observers exactly as in Study 3. Participants were then asked to predict how much they would have moderated their initial impression of the speaker's true attitudes if they had been in the experiment, on a scale ranging from 0 (*moderate not at all*) to 9 (*moderate a great deal*). Participants made a similar prediction about how much the actual observers in the study moderated their initial impressions of the speaker's true attitudes. The order in which participants predicted their own and the observers' moderation was counterbalanced, and there was no effect of order on any of our results.

### Results and Discussion

We predicted that participants' tendency to expect their peers to have engaged in less situational correction than they would have themselves would be moderated by the manipulated desirability of situational versus dispositional attributions. We examined this prediction with a 2 (condition: dispositional vs. situational)  $\times$  2 (target: self vs. peers) mixed-model ANOVA. This analysis yielded the anticipated two-way interaction,  $F(1, 44) = 8.87, p = .005$ . Participants who had read about the benefits of a situation-focused attributional style predicted that the actual observers moderated their initial impressions significantly less than they would have themselves,  $t(22) = 2.46, p = .022$  (see the left side of Figure 4). In contrast, participants who had read about the benefits of a disposition-focused attributional style predicted that the actual observers moderated their initial impression marginally more than they would have themselves,  $t(22) = 1.71, p = .10$  (see the right side of Figure 4). Thus, the tendency to ascribe greater situational correction to the self than to others was reversed when a propensity toward dispositional attributions (for which no situational correction is required) was favorably described.

Notice that our manipulation of the benefits of dispositional versus situational attributions had a larger effect on participants' predictions of the observers' situational correction,  $t(44) = 2.49, p = .017$  (the white bars in Figure 4), than on their predictions of their own correction ( $t < 1$ ; the black bars in Figure 4). This may be because people's awareness of their own corrective efforts makes it easier to alter their impressions of the attributional processes of an ambiguous group of observers than to alter their impressions of their own attributional processes. In addition, prior research has found that people often derogate others in response to a self-esteem threat rather than glorify themselves, thereby making the self look good by comparison (Beauregard & Dunning, 1998; Brown & Gallagher, 1992).

### General Discussion

Everyday explanations of behavior tend to overemphasize the actor's stable dispositions and underemphasize prevailing situa-

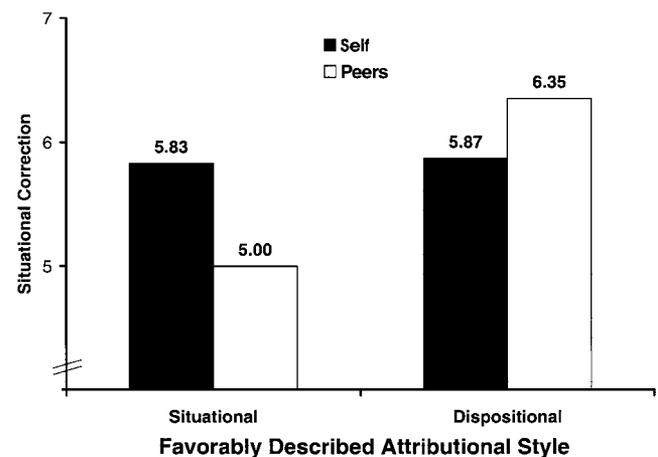


Figure 4. Participants' ratings of how much they and their peers would moderate their initial dispositional inferences about a constrained actors' behavior, made after participants learned that either a dispositional or situational explanatory style conferred significant life advantages.

tional influences (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Jones, 1979, 1990; Ross, 1977). The foregoing studies indicate that people in individualistic cultures expect other social perceivers to be more prone to this correspondence bias than they are themselves. People expected their peers to emphasize dispositional factors more than they did themselves when explaining a “real-world” event (Study 1) and when explaining a constrained—but not an unconstrained—actor’s behavior in a commonly used attribution paradigm (Study 2). We suggested that these biased perceptions of the correspondence bias stem partly from people’s awareness of their own situational correction (as documented in the pilot study described in the introduction), their view of situational correction as desirable, and their desire to see themselves as superior person perceivers. Corroborating our analysis, people’s conviction that they engage in more situational correction than their peers was diminished among Japanese, who are less motivated than Americans to view themselves as superior to their peers (Study 3). This belief was reversed among people who were encouraged to view favorably the tendency to make dispositional attributions (Study 4).

Although the motivation to view oneself favorably exacerbates people’s biased assessments of situational correction in self and others, we doubt that such motivations are necessary for such biased perceptions to arise. Other less motivational mechanisms may also lead people to expect others to engage in less situational correction than themselves. Because situational correction is an effortful, internal process, for example, it is readily detected in oneself but difficult to detect in others. The greater availability of one’s own corrective efforts than those of others may lead people to infer that they engage in more situational correction than other people do (Schwarz & Vaughn, 2002; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).

Because people’s belief that their peers engage in less situational correction than they do themselves can be tied to such basic psychological processes as self-enhancement motives and availability, what we have documented here may be part of a more general belief that people engage in more mental correction—of any kind—than their peers. Many social judgments require the exertion of mental effort to correct for erroneous first impressions (Gilbert, 2002) or for the “contaminating” effects of misleading information or irrational motives (Wilson, Centerbar, & Brekke, 2002). Such corrective models have been implicated in a variety of social judgments, including people’s tendency to think that their feelings in different psychological states will resemble their current feelings more than they do (Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 2002; Van Boven & Loewenstein, in press; Van Boven, Loewenstein, Welch, & Dunning, 2003), that their own perceptions resemble those of people in different emotional states more than they do (Van Boven, Dunning, & Loewenstein, 2000; Van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003; Van Boven, Loewenstein, & Dunning, in press), that they would have “known it all along,” even when they would not (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2003), that others notice and pay attention to them more than they do (Gilovich, Kruger, & Medvec, 2002; Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000), that their internal states are more discernible by others than they are (Gilovich, Savitsky, & Medvec, 1998; Van Boven, Gilovich, & Medvec, 2003), and the list goes on. We suspect that to the extent that each of these mental corrections feels

effortful, people may perceive themselves to engage in more correction than their peers.

People’s mistaken assessment that they engage in more situational correction than others naturally raises the issue of whether people overestimate their own correction, underestimate others’ correction, or both. Although our studies do not speak directly to this issue, the results of Studies 1 and 2, in which people overestimated how much others’ attributions emphasize dispositional factors, imply that people underestimate others’ situational correction. We suspect that people also overestimate their own situational correction—but at the moment, that is only a suspicion that must await the outcome of future research.

We also suspect that people’s conviction that they engage in more situational correction than others may influence their attributions for situationally constrained actors’ behavior. One reason that situational correction tends to be insufficient is that the appropriate amount of situational correction is often ambiguous, so people tend to be conservative, ceasing correction when their estimate is “good enough.” To the degree that people rely on a sense of their relative accuracy as a stopping cue for situational correction, their biased assessments of correction in themselves and others may lead them to cease correcting too soon. In other words, they may reason erroneously, “I’m not sure how much to correct, but I’ve corrected more than other people, so that’s probably good enough.”

In addition to their implications for everyday social judgment, our findings have implications for everyday social behavior. For example, biased perceptions of situational correction in self and others may contribute to people’s tendency to view media messages as more influential for others than for the self. This *third-person effect* (Davison, 1983) has been documented with respect to a variety of media messages, such as advertisements for gambling (Youn, Faber, & Shah, 2000), television violence (Salwen & Dupagne, 1999), political campaign spots (Salwen, 1998), and news coverage of the conflict in the Middle East (Perloff, 1989). To the extent that people discount or correct their own initial impressions of media messages (“He said lower capital-gains taxes would boost the economy, but given what his contributors stand to gain from such a cut, of course he’d say that!”), the present results imply that individuals may credit their peers with less effortful correction and consequently expect their peers to take biased claims more at face value.

Further investigation of this possibility might be especially worthwhile given that the third-person effect has been linked to support for censorship of media communications in particular and free speech more generally (Davison, 1983; Salwen, 1998). Our results suggest that people may support censorship out of a desire to protect others from vulgar speech and images but see no need to protect themselves. If so, then calling people’s attention to their biased perceptions of corrective processes in themselves and others might permit a more clear-headed stance toward censorship.

In conclusion, literature throughout the world is replete with implicit warnings of the self-destructive dangers of overzealous desires—such as Midas’ starvation amidst a sea of wealth. The present research describes a much less dramatic tragedy in social perception: People’s desire to see themselves as individuals who perceive the social world more accurately than others stands in the way, ironically, of accurate social perceptions. People perceive a difference between themselves and others that is not there. Peo-

ple's illusion that they engage in more situational correction than their peers might feel good, but it also makes them less accurate.

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Received November 13, 2001  
 Revision received April 3, 2003  
 Accepted April 3, 2003 ■

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