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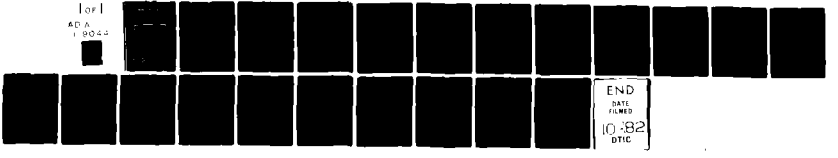

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# PERSONNEL TECHNOLOGY

## AN EXAMINATION OF HISPANIC AND GENERAL POPULATION PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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# ATTRIBUTIONS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE AMONG HISPANIC AND MAINSTREAM NAVY RECRUITS

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

Forty-nine Mainstream and 41 Hispanic male Navy recruits responded to a questionnaire consisting of 16 items in which they were asked to make a judgment, on a 7 point scale (true--to--false), about the likelihood

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that particular causal explanations might be valid in the case of eight success and eight failure events. While the outcome (success-failure) produced large differences in the attributions there were no differences traceable to ethnicity. Both groups took much credit for success, i.e., showed a self-serving bias. These results are consistent with previous research in this project which found only minor differences between Hispanic and Mainstream Navy recruits.

# Attributions of Success and Failure among Hispanic and Mainstream Navy Recruits

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Because of the fact that the range of possible explanations for why some event occurs is very large and may also vary from culture to culture (Triandis, 1972), researchers interested in the area consider causality attributions according to their underlying dimensions. Weiner and associates (e.g., Weiner & Kukla, 1970; Weiner, 1979) for example, have proposed three dimensions for attributions of causality for success or failure situations: (a) locus (causes may be internal or external to the person); (b) stability (causes may be enduring or changing), and (c) controllability (causes may or may not be subject to volitional control). These dimensional properties of causes have been found to be related to important psychological consequences as originally proposed by attribution theory. In this sense, locus is related to self esteem, stability is related to expectancies for future success, and controllability is relevant to feelings of satisfaction and evaluations by others.

A phenomenon that has received a great deal of attention in the study of attribution processes is the so-called self serving bias (see Miller & Ross, 1975). Although the controversial cognitive vs. motivational explanation of the phenomenon has stimulated considerable research (e.g., Bradley, 1978; Miller, 1978; Weary, 1979; Zuckerman, 1979), it seems that the controversy cannot be properly solved now (i.e., Tetlock & Levi, 1982). Despite this state of affairs, the fact that people tend to take more responsibility for favorable outcomes than for unfavorable ones, seems very well established at least in the United States. This is not the case in some

cross-cultural studies. For instance, Fry and Gosh (1980) report that Asian Indian children in Canada assumed more responsibility for failure than for success, whereas Caucasian Canadian children assumed more responsibility for success than for failure.

Experimental data on the self-serving bias phenomenon among Hispanics is lacking although some evidence would suggest lack of cultural differences, at least in terms of internal vs. external attributions (Hui, Triandis & Chang, Note 1).

The present study examined preferred attributions of causality for achievement related events among Hispanic and Mainstream young adult men. Similarities or differences in attributions made by both groups can be informative not only in terms of possible culture specific attributional differences but also in terms of the behavioral implications of the attributions for self esteem and expectancies for future success.

## Method

### Subjects

Forty-nine Mainstream and 41 Hispanic male Navy recruits responded to a questionnaire while being classified into Navy jobs, as part of a larger study of their perceptions of the social environment. In each of the three Navy recruit stations (Florida, California, and Illinois) when a Spanish-surname recruit was to be classified, the classification officer checked the recruit's self-identification on an application form on which "Hispanic" was one of the ways in which the applicant could describe himself. If the Spanish-surname recruit had selected the "Hispanic" self-identification label, he was asked to complete the questionnaire. At that time another recruit (with a non-Spanish surname) was randomly selected and given the same questionnaire. These other recruits are here referred to as "Mainstream" and will

include both whites and blacks as well as Hispanics who did not identify themselves as "Hispanic."

Instrument

A questionnaire consisting of 16 items was used in this study where the respondents were asked to judge on a seven-point scale (1, definitely true, 7 definitely false) how valid each type of causal explanation was for a success event (eight items) and a failure (eight items). Each set of eight items tapped the three dimensional classifications of causal explanations proposed by Weiner (1979) (internal vs. external; stable vs. unstable; controllable vs. uncontrollable). The specific attributions judged by the subjects included ability, task difficulty, immediate effort, typical efforts, mood, luck and usual or unusual help or neglect by others. For example, the item "I was in a very good mood while doing the task" referred to an internal, unstable and uncontrollable causal explanation.

## Results

The responses provided by the subjects were grouped into indices of internality, stability and controllability by subtracting the sum of ratings for one type of explanations (e.g., externality) from the sum of ratings for the opposite attribution (e.g., internality).

A two-way analysis of variance was computed with outcome (success or failure) and ethnicity (Mainstream or Hispanic) as independent variables and the internality index as dependent variable. The results of the analysis showed that the main effect for outcome was significant [$F(1,178) = 29.9$, $p < .01$] whereas the main effect for ethnicity and the interaction between outcome and ethnicity did not reach significance. As shown in Table 1, both Mainstream and Hispanic respondents took more responsibility for their success than for their failure. This pattern suggests then that the self serving bias is operating among our respondents at least in terms of internality.

A MANOVA was done with ethnicity and outcome as the independent variables and internality, stability and controllability as the dependent variables. Again there was no significant difference for ethnicity and there was a highly significant difference by outcome ($F = 19.5$, $p < .001$). Univariate tests did not change this pattern of findings. The corresponding means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

Next, the rating of each item was examined by a two-way MANOVA with outcome and ethnicity as independent variables. The main effect of outcome reached significance ($F = 13.3$, $p < .01$), while neither ethnicity nor the interaction reached a significant multivariate effect.

In order to further examine the multivariate effect of outcome on the eight dependent variables, univariate F-tests were performed. Table 2 shows how both Hispanic and Mainstream Navy recruits produced significantly different attribution ratings depending on the outcome of their behavior (success or failure) attributable to ability, immediate and typical effort, task difficulty, mood, and usual help or neglect by others. In examining the attribution means (Table 3), both cultural groups showed high attribution ratings for success on ability and on both immediate and typical effort, and relatively high ratings on immediate effort for failure. Although in this analysis the F-ratio for the ethnicity main effect was almost significant, this seems to be a reflection of the number of dependent variables. We are inclined to ignore this result.

## Discussion

The result of this study supports the pattern of findings in the large project concerning Navy recruits, of which this is only a part. The pattern is that the Hispanic and Mainstream recruits do not differ very much except in details. In this study, both ethnic groups showed a self-serving bias; i.e., they took more responsibility for their successes than for their failures.

They also showed the type of attribution pattern that those who are high on need for achievement tend to show (Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest & Rosenbaum, 1972). That is, our respondents attributed their failure to a lack of effort rather than a lack of ability.

However, one caution seems in order. The questions of the present study were asked in a very abstract and relatively context-free manner, therefore the respondents' answers are expected to reflect their abstract and contextless beliefs about themselves that they would attribute in a certain manner when they "succeed" or "fail". The pattern of attribution ratings may differ depending on the situations in which the outcomes are experienced. Another possible factor that affects attribution is the extent to which people are involved in the task performance (e.g., Miller, 1976).

Another rival hypothesis is that both Hispanic and Mainstream recruits are presenting themselves in the best light (see Bradley, 1978; Miller, 1978; Weary, 1979, for discussion of self-presentational bias in attribution). To put it differently, the reactivity of questions may explain the present result. However, this possibility seems weak because of the convergence of the present finding with other findings about the same population.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Attributions by Ethnic Group and by Outcome

| Ethnic | Internality | | Stability | | Controllability | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | Failure | Success | Failure | Success | Failure | Success |
| Hispanics (N=41) | .6(5.6) | 5.8(6.7) | -1.2(4.7) | 2.0(4.5) | 0.0(4.7) | 1.4(5.4) |
| Mainstream (N=49) | .9(4.7) | 4.9(5.3) | -1.0(5.2) | 2.5(3.2) | -.2(5.0) | 2.3(4.3) |

Note: The larger the number the more the attribution reflects the label heading the column.

Table 2

Results of F-test for each Possible Attribution

| Hypothesis | MS | Error MS | F |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ability | 144.0 | 2.7 | 53.31** |
| Immediate Effort | 28.0 | 2.9 | 9.57** |
| Typical Effort | 271.3 | 3.4 | 79.93** |
| Task Difficulty | 28.0 | 2.9 | 9.57** |
| Luck | .1 | 3.3 | .02 |
| Mood | 16.2 | 3.0 | 5.36* |
| Unusual Help or Neglect by Others | 5.3 | 3.2 | 1.65 |
| Usual Help or Neglect by Others | 32.1 | 2.8 | 11.41** |

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Note: all df = 1.176

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Attribution Ratings

| Attributional Referents | Mainstream | | Hispanic | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Failure | Success | Failure | Success |
| Ability | 4.0 (1.6) | 5.8 (1.4) | 3.5 (1.9) | 5.3 (1.7) |
| Immediate effort | 4.5 (2.0) | 5.8 (1.4) | 3.9 (2.1) | 5.8 (1.6) |
| Typical effort | 3.2 (2.1) | 5.2 (1.6) | 3.0 (2.2) | 6.0 (1.4) |
| Task difficulty | 4.1 (1.8) | 4.4 (1.5) | 3.5 (1.8) | 4.8 (1.8) |
| Luck | 3.2 (1.7) | 3.0 (1.7) | 3.0 (1.9) | 3.3 (2.0) |
| Mood | 4.1 (1.5) | 4.4 (1.6) | 3.8 (2.0) | 4.8 (1.8) |
| Unusual help or neglect by others | 4.0 (1.8) | 4.4 (1.6) | 3.8 (1.8) | 4.0 (2.0) |
| Usual help or neglect by others | 3.6 (1.8) | 4.6 (1.3) | 3.2 (1.6) | 3.9 (1.9) |

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