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WHEN DO WE FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR OTHER PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES?

Vanessa K. Bohns, Daniel A. Newark and
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ABSTRACT

Purpose – We explore how, and how accurately, people assess their influence over others' behavior and attitudes. We describe the process by which a person would determine whether he or she was responsible for changing someone else's behavior or attitude, and the perceptual, motivational, and cognitive factors that are likely to impact whether an influencer's claims of responsibility are excessive, insufficient, or accurate.

Methodology/approach – We first review classic work on social influence, responsibility or blame attribution, and perceptions of control, identifying a gap in the literature with respect to understanding how people judge their own responsibility for other people's behavior and attitudes. We then draw from a wide range of social psychological research to propose a model of how an individual would determine his or her degree of responsibility for someone else's behavior or attitude.

Practical implications – A potential influencer's beliefs about the extent of his or her influence can determine whether he or she engages in an influence attempt, how he or she engages in such an attempt, and whether he or she takes responsibility for another person's behavior or beliefs.

Originality/value of paper – For decades, scholars researching social influence have explored how one's behavior and attitudes are shaped by one's social environment. However, amidst this focus on the perspective of the target of social influence, the perspective of the influencer has been ignored.

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This paper addresses the largely neglected question of how much responsibility influencers take for the impact their words, actions, and presence have on others.

Keywords: Influence; persuasion; social cognition; responsibility; attribution; attitudes

You made what you thought was a throwaway remark but, unbeknownst to you, it caused a colleague to reassess his career. You felt vindicated when your spouse finally heeded your pleas to start exercising, but in reality he began jogging because his doctor insisted on it. At graduation, you were both touched and surprised when a student you met only twice said she could not have graduated without your mentorship. These examples illustrate some common ways in which we may or may not influence other people's behavior and attitudes, and, moreover, ways in which we may misjudge that influence.

In this paper, we ask: How calibrated to reality are people's perceptions of their influence over others? We first motivate this research question by describing the unique perspective of a potential influencer and highlighting the importance of understanding the process of social influence from this perspective. We then differentiate the process of determining one's own responsibility for another person's behavior or attitude from outside observers' judgments of responsibility and from the process of determining one's own responsibility for chance outcomes – both questions that have been explored in other research.

Ultimately, we propose a model outlining the process by which – and the perceptual, motivational, and cognitive factors that are likely to impact when – people recognize, or fail to recognize, the extent of their influence over others' behavior and attitudes. Specifically, we identify factors that are likely to lead an influencer to (1) overclaim responsibility for a target's behavior or attitude; (2) underclaim responsibility for a target's behavior or attitude; or (3) accurately claim responsibility for a target's behavior or attitude.

WHY FOCUS ON THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INFLUENCER?

For decades, social influence has been a central topic of study for social psychologists. As Crano and Prislin (2011) pointed out, “it could be argued that a history of social influence research is a history of social psychology” (p. 321). Similarly, Robert Zajonc (1965) claimed that “the main efforts of social psychology [are] the problem of how and why the behavior of one individual affects the behavior of another” (p. 269). As such, extensive work has been conducted on the topic of social influence, painting a rich portrait of the variety of ways – large and small – that we are influenced by the people around us. This wide-ranging body of research has demonstrated that we are influenced not only by others' overt persuasive appeals and requests (Bohns, Roghanizad, & Xu, 2014; Chaiken, 1980; Cialdini, 1987; Flynn & Lake (Bohns), 2008; Milgram, 1963; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), but also by simply observing others' behavior (Asch,

1951; Bandura, 1961; Gino & Galinsky, 2012; Latané & Darley, 1969; Nolan, Schultz, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2008), by the subtle touch of another person (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016, 2017; Levav & Argo, 2010), and by the mere presence of others (Bond, 1982; Boothby, Clark, & Bargh, 2014; Carver & Scheier, 1981; Zajonc, 1965, 1980). The upshot of decades of research is that our behaviors, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and decisions are undeniably shaped by our social environment.

However, this is only half of the social influence story. Not only are we influenced by others, but also we are a source of influence over others (Bohns, 2016). Our words, behaviors, and mere presence impact others just as others' words, behaviors, and mere presence impact us. Yet while there is extensive work on the consequences of social influence for the target of that influence, the influencer's perspective – in particular, his or her expectations and assumptions about his or her impact over others – has largely been neglected (for rare exceptions, see, Bohns, 2016; Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988; Johnson, Feigenbaum, & Weiby, 1964). In most studies of social influence, it is either taken for granted that the influencer intended to influence the target and is aware of his or her impact, or questions concerning the motivations and awareness of the influencer are ignored entirely. However, understanding influencers' beliefs about their own influence is essential to determining whether people are likely to engage in influence attempts, how they engage in such attempts, and when they take responsibility for another person's actions (accurately or not). If we think our boss is unlikely to implement a solution we propose, we are unlikely to speak up (Bohns, 2015; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). If we fail to recognize the bad advice a student has derived from a misinterpretation of a comment we made, we will have no opportunity to remedy the situation.

Social influence requires at least two people. We cannot fully understand the process of social influence if we focus only on the motivations and perceptions of one.

TAKING VS ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY

The current paper is specifically concerned with how and when an individual takes or forsakes his or her own responsibility for another person's behavior or attitude. This is in contrast to research exploring how outside observers judge an individual's culpability for some action or consequence.

There has been a significant amount of research on this latter topic. Classic work by Heider (1958) outlined a series of conditions, adapted and modified by subsequent researchers (e.g., Cushman, 2008; Malle, Guglielmo, & Monroe, 2014; Shaver, 2012), under which an actor is likely to be deemed responsible for a given outcome. Such conditions vary by model, but include such considerations as agent causality, the foreseeability of a given outcome, the intentionality of the actor, and the seriousness of the outcome. Other work has identified additional factors that influence outside observers' attributions of an actor's responsibility for a given outcome, including the valence of the outcome (Knobe, 2003, 2004; Leslie, Knobe, & Cohen, 2006) and attributes of the potential influencer

(Gailey, 2013; Kennedy & Anderson, 2017; Leslie et al., 2006; Paharia, Kassam, Greene, & Bazerman, 2009; Sanders, Hamilton-Taylor, & Jones, 1996). For example, researchers have found that we are more likely to deem others responsible for unintended negative consequences than unintended positive ones (Knobe, 2003, 2004; Leslie et al., 2006). And research has found that the power and status of an influencer are positively correlated with whether outside observers assign responsibility for negative outcomes (Kennedy & Anderson, 2017; Sanders et al., 1996). That is, a CEO is typically judged to be more culpable for the unethical practices of his or her company than someone lower in the company's hierarchy.

While outside observers have their own cognitive biases and motivations, those biases and motivations likely diverge significantly from those of potential influencers. For example, while outside observers are more likely to judge an actor as responsible for a negative outcome than a positive one (Knobe, 2003, 2004; Leslie et al., 2006), a potential influencer will generally have the opposite inclination, being more motivated to judge him or himself responsible for a positive outcome than a negative one (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Bradley, 1978; Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967; Markman & Tetlock, 2000). Similarly, while a CEO may appear to an outsider to be more culpable for organizational wrongdoing than one of his or her subordinates, the CEO is likely to see this situation differently (Fast & Tiedens, 2010). Thus, there is reason to doubt the generalizability of conclusions drawn from work on third parties assigning responsibility to others to the question of when people are likely to take or forsake responsibility for the behavior of another person they themselves may have influenced.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUTCOMES THAT INVOLVE HUMAN BEHAVIOR VS THOSE THAT DO NOT

Another difference between the focus of the current paper and previous research is the distinction between taking responsibility for another person's behavior or attitude and taking responsibility for an outcome that does not involve human behavior (e.g., a chance event). We are specifically interested in how individuals judge their influence over people, not random occurrences or consequences external to a person's attitudes or behaviors. Much work has explored how responsible people feel in these latter situations. For example, research on this topic has demonstrated how the fundamental human motivation to feel in control over one's environment (Fiske, 2002; Kelley, 1973) can lead to illusions of control over chance events such as coin tosses and lotteries (Langer, 1975; Langer & Roth, 1975).

This desire for control has also been used to explain self-serving biases, in which people are more willing to take responsibility for positive outcomes than negative outcomes (Arkin et al., 1980; Bradley, 1978; Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967). For example, Markman and Tetlock (2000) found that participants who were informed that stocks they had chosen performed poorly as a result of unforeseen circumstances were more likely to deny responsibility for the outcome, claiming they "couldn't have known" about the unforeseen circumstance,

than were those who were told their stocks had performed well as a result of unforeseen circumstances.

In each of these cases, however, the outcome over which an individual is claiming (or forsaking) responsibility is not another person's behavior or attitude. While some of the motivations identified by this research on claiming responsibility for such outcomes, such as a desire to feel in control of one's environment, are also likely to be pertinent when judging one's influence over another person, there are important differences between judging one's influence over a chance outcome such as a lottery or stock investment and another person's behavior or belief.

One notable difference is that the outcomes of chance events tend to be clear and conclusive. The result of a coin toss is heads or tails; a stock price either rises or falls. Thus, the only question a potential influencer must answer when considering what led to such an outcome is whether he or she caused it or could have foreseen it: Did I will that coin to come up heads? Could I have anticipated that the stock price would fall? Conversely, a change in a person's behavior or attitude is often ambiguous and uncertain. Attitudes and behaviors can change in myriad ways, making the variety of potential outcomes considerable. Moreover, targets of influence can downplay or exaggerate a change of heart or a change in behavior, making it more difficult for an influencer to accurately detect whether a given outcome has even occurred.

Further, the fact that people have intentionality means that judging whether one has influenced another person requires considering more than just one's own role in a given situation. It also requires a potential influencer to take another person's perspective and to judge how someone else's cognitions, motivations, and emotions have likely impacted his or her reaction to an influence attempt. People can be resistant or amenable to change, they can be selective in the ways they process and interpret information, and they can have emotional reactions in ways that coins and stocks cannot. Thus, determining whether one has caused another person's behavior draws from an entirely different set of social cognitive mental processes and aptitudes (e.g., perspective-taking, empathy, social prediction) than does determining whether one has caused a chance event or an outcome external to human behavior (cf. Malle et al., 2014).

HOW DO WE DETERMINE OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS' BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES?

Interpersonal influence occurs when one person changes¹ another person's attitude or behavior (Chaiken, Wood, & Eagly, 1996; Reardon, 1991). As such, for an individual to come to the conclusion that he or she influenced, and therefore is responsible for, another person's behavior or attitude, he or she must first come to the conclusion that a behavior or attitude change has taken place. If a potential influencer believes that there was no behavioral or attitudinal influence of any kind, then the matter is resolved – he or she has nothing for which to take responsibility. If, on the other hand, a potential influencer detects a behavior or attitude change, the next questions he or she must answer concern the

root cause of the change. Does the potential influencer believe the other person's change in behavior or attitude is the result of some internal cause (i.e., the person herself) or some external force? And if the change is attributed to an external force, to which external force is it attributed (e.g., oneself, a different potential influencer, or other circumstances)? The answers to each of these questions will be impacted by various perceptual factors (e.g., whether the influence was immediately detectable) and motivational factors (e.g., whether the influence was intended or desirable). As such, the answers are susceptible to bias that may lead to inaccurate assessments of one's influence.

In the following sections, we organize the process of determining one's responsibility for another's behavior according to the three main questions a potential influencer must answer to arrive at the conclusion that he or she is in fact responsible: (1) Did a change occur? (2) Was the change extrinsically driven? (3) Was the change the result of something *I* said or did? For each question in the model, we describe the process involved in answering that question. We then present the perceptual, cognitive, and motivational factors that are likely to affect each of these processes and therefore moderate the potential influencer's answers. Our complete model is depicted in Fig. 1.

DID A CHANGE OCCUR? SIGNAL STRENGTH AND DETECTION OF CHANGE

Identifying a change in someone else's attitude or behavior is essentially a form of signal detection (Nevin, 1969; Wickens, 2002). That is, a potential influencer must decide whether a change is present or absent under conditions of ambiguity, which may result in the potential influencer correctly identifying a change (a "hit"), correctly assuming no change occurred (a "correct rejection"), missing a change that in fact occurred (a "miss"), or perceiving a change that was not in fact there (a "false alarm"). The accuracy with which an individual will perform this task depends on both the discriminability of the signals available that indicate a change has occurred (e.g., the observability of the influence act and/or the target's response to it), and anything that might cause the influencer to be generally more or less likely to perceive a change (e.g., self-serving motivations, cognitive limitations). Below we review the cognitive and motivational factors that are likely to moderate the strength, and resulting discriminability, of the signals arising from the influencer indicating that they have done something that could elicit a change, the signals arising from the target indicating that a change has actually taken place, as well as factors that are likely to moderate a potential influencer's bias towards detecting, or not detecting, a change.

Strength of the Influencer's Signals

One person's perceived responsibility for another person's behavior or attitude starts with an act of influence. This act can take various forms: a behavior, an argument, or even one's mere presence. Each of these forms of influence varies in terms of its signal strength, and may therefore signal a change in behavior or

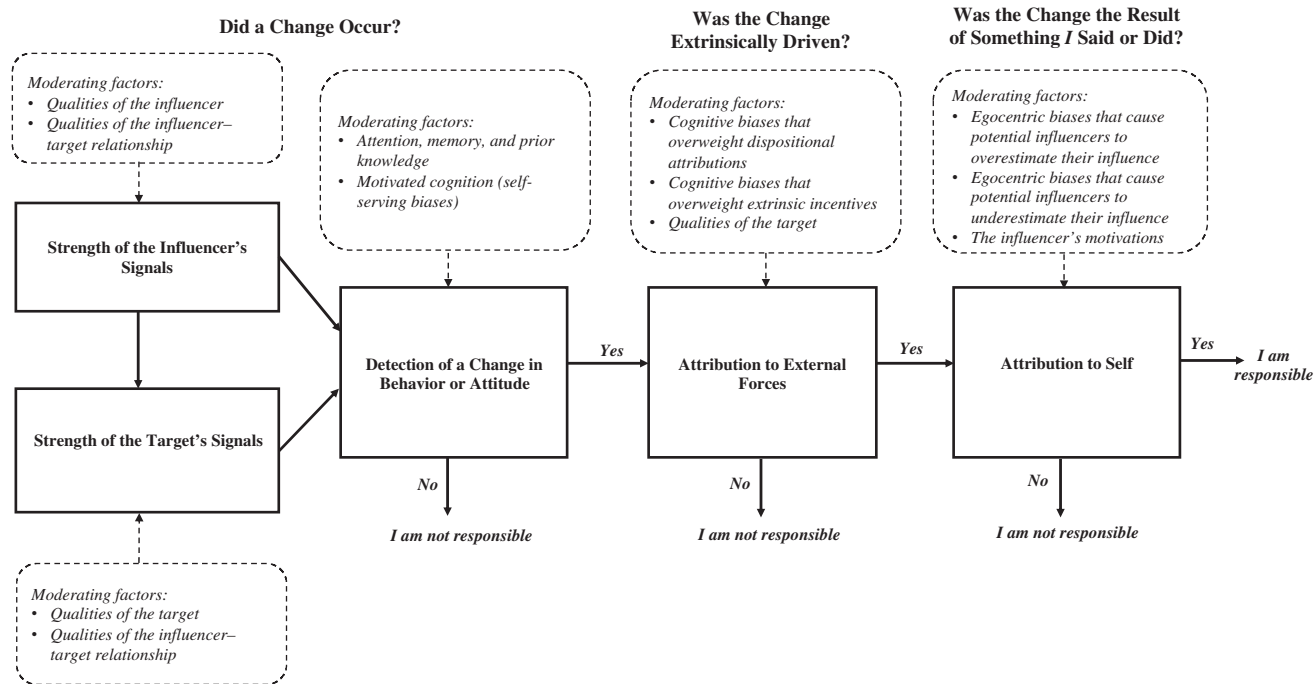


Fig. 1. A Model of How We Determine Whether We Are Responsible for Changing Someone Else's Behavior or Attitude.

attitude on the part of the influence target to varying degrees. For example, one's mere presence at an event may elicit a corresponding attitude change on the part of a target, but mere presence may be too subtle a behavior for a potential influencer to code as an act of influence, possibly causing the influencer to miss the target's resulting change in attitude. On the other hand, the act of crafting a long, carefully reasoned email is likely to be highly salient to a potential influencer and therefore coded as a clear act of influence (regardless of whether the target takes the time to read the email), potentially causing the influencer to falsely detect a change that did not occur.

Moderators of the Strength of the Influencer's Signals

Qualities of the Influencer

Some individuals may be generally predisposed to engage in clear, undeniable acts of influence. For example, individuals high on dispositional traits that entail the manipulation and influence of others, such as Machiavellianism (Jones & Paulhus, 2009; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), traits associated with an overblown sense of one's own self-importance, such as narcissism (Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015; Zitek & Jordan, 2016), and individuals high in trait dominance (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009) may be more likely to intentionally attempt to influence others and to do so forcefully and directly. Further, individuals who have general authority – generally higher power or status – may have a history of influencing others via direct requests and orders. Overall, these individual qualities may lead potential influencers to engage in influence acts that are easily coded as such, thus signaling the possibility of a corresponding change in attitude or behavior.

Qualities of the Influencer–Target Relationship

In addition to general authority, a potential influencer may have a specific, formal sort of authority over a target, as in the case of a professor and a student, or a boss and an employee. When the direction of influence seems one-sided, even if is not (see Bohns & Flynn, 2013; DeCremer & Tenbrunsel, 2012; Hollander & Webb, 1955), the authority figure may engage in more direct and intentional forms of influence (e.g., explicit advice, direct orders), while subordinates may engage in subtler, potentially even unintentional, forms of influence (e.g., suggesting, storytelling). Other relationship qualities, such as closeness and liking, frequency of interaction, and relationship type (e.g., hierarchical, romantic, friendship, familial), may similarly impact the form of the influence act in terms of its directness, forcefulness, and intentionality. For example, one may feel free to give direct, forceful advice to one's sibling in a way one would not to an acquaintance, and one's parents' presence or absence at an event is more likely to be coded as something that might impact a child's behavior than the presence or absence of a stranger. Overall, these qualities of the influencer–target relationship may affect the salience of the influence act and therefore whether it is coded as such.

Strength of the Target's Signals

Following an influence act is a target's response to it. A target can respond in a variety of ways to another person's influence. People can have immediate or delayed reactions to influence attempts, they can have one reaction immediately which can change with time (e.g., Cook & Flay, 1978), or they can have one reaction publicly and another privately (e.g., Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994). Relatedly, an attitude or behavior change may be small or large. All of these affect the discriminability of the change signal, making it more or less difficult for a potential influencer to detect. A change that happens an hour, a week, or a month following an influence act, or is subtle, such as a shift in attitude, will be less perceptible to the potential influencer. The extent to which an individual reacts in obvious ways (i.e., with large, immediate behavioral changes) to an influence attempt is moderated by various features of the target and his or her relationship to the influencer.

Moderators of the Strength of the Target's Signals

Qualities of the Target

Some individuals may be generally predisposed to react to influence acts in more obvious and immediate ways. For example, individuals high in trait agreeableness are motivated to maintain positive relationships (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997). A corresponding component of agreeableness is a tendency to comply with and defer to others rather than resisting attempts at influence (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996). Further, a target's preexisting attitudes and inclinations may interact with an influence act. For example, convincing someone to do the opposite of what he or she had previously intended is likely to lead to a larger and more perceptible change than just increasing slightly the person's confidence in the wisdom of what he or she already intended to do. Therefore, the first type of change should be easier to detect than the second.

Qualities of the Influencer–Target Relationship

In addition to genuinely reacting to an influence attempt to various degrees, a person may be motivated to hide or exaggerate the degree to which he or she was influenced by a particular influencer for self-presentational or relational reasons. For example, a child who follows her parents' advice may conceal that fact in order to protect her pride (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997). Alternatively, an employee wanting to make a good impression on the boss may explicitly note or overplay the ways in which he or she has incorporated the boss's advice over the past week (Brooks, Gino, & Schweitzer, 2015). Thus, those who are influenced often have some control over how detectable any influence is to a potential influencer, and the strength of the target's signals can be impacted by motivations related to the influencer–target relationship.

Detection of a Change in Behavior or Attitude

As mentioned earlier, the accuracy with which an individual will detect a change in behavior or attitude depends both on the discriminability of the available signals (i.e., the influence act and a target's reaction to it) and any bias exhibited by the influencer that may lead him or her to be more or less sensitive to a change. Here we turn to this latter factor and review cognitive and motivational factors that may contribute to a given influencer's bias towards (or against) detecting a change in a target's behavior or attitude.

Attention, Memory, and Prior Knowledge

While there are features of the potential behavior or attitude change itself, such as its size and proximity, that make it more or less perceptible to a potential influencer, there are also features of the influencer's attention and memory that are likely to make him or her more or less attuned to potential changes. An influencer under heavy cognitive load may be less accurate in noticing a change, coding an influence attempt as such, or remembering whether an influence attempt was made. For example, a busy college professor meeting with multiple students a day may not have the cognitive resources to notice when a student seems to be particularly impacted by a piece of advice, causing her to underestimate the likelihood that an attitude change occurred. Alternatively, the same professor may not have the cognitive resources to notice when a particular student was not in class to hear a piece of advice she shared with everyone, causing her to overestimate the likelihood that an attitude change occurred in that student.

Further, memory effects may impact actual influence differently from perceived influence. For example, in a phenomenon known as the "sleeping effect," an argument made by an untrustworthy source, or an argument whose credibility is discounted in some other way, is only weakly persuasive at first, but tends to increase in persuasive strength over time as the poor credibility cue is forgotten while the content of the argument remains (Cook, Gruder, Hennigan, & Flay, 1979; Cook & Flay, 1978; Gruder et al., 1978; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Pratkanis, Greenwald, Leippe, & Baumgardner, 1988). Thus, attitudinal change may increase with time, particularly with respect to weak initial arguments. However, a potential influencer is unlikely to understand this quirk of persuasion, and ultimately a time delay is more likely to decrease his or her memory and awareness of any attitudinal change that may have taken place.

In addition, a potential influencer may or may not be aware of a person's initial position or behavioral inclination (Rader, Soll, & Larrick, 2015). If a person already agreed with the influencer's stance on a given issue, or had already been planning to do what an influencer is trying to get him or her to do, the resulting behavior may appear to the influencer to represent a tangible change, when in fact there was no change at all.

Motivated Cognition

In addition to an influencer having limited cognitive resources, the resources he or she does have are likely to be influenced by various motivational biases. A long history of research on motivated cognition has demonstrated our tendency to see what we want to see (Kruglanski, 1996; Kruglanski et al., 2012). Thus, all else equal, an influencer who is motivated to perceive a behavior change is more likely to see one than an influencer who is motivated not to perceive a behavior change. Unlike a neutral observer, a potential influencer has a stake in the final attribution of influence that is made. This is likely to motivate the tendency to view a change for the self-serving reasons outlined earlier (Arkin et al., 1980; Bradley, 1978; Heider, 1958; Johnson et al., 1964; Kelley, 1967; Markman & Tetlock, 2000). If a potential influencer sees a behavior or attitude change as positive, she may be biased towards detecting such a change. If she sees it as negative, she may be biased towards missing it. Further, qualities of the influencer – for example, the traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and dominance discussed earlier – may bias a potential influencer towards detecting a change because of a general inclination to believe that one is highly influential.

WAS THE CHANGE EXTRINSICALLY DRIVEN? ATTRIBUTION TO EXTERNAL FORCES

If a behavior or attitude change is detected, the next question a potential influencer must answer concerns the root cause of the change. Does the potential influencer view the other person's change in behavior or attitude to be the result of some internal force? That is, did the target individual feel compelled to make a change for reasons stemming from *within*, or is this change attributable to some *external* cause? A potential influencer must determine whether it is likely that the target individual would have made this change on his or her own or whether there is a particularly compelling external explanation. As with the question of whether a change is detected in the first place, various cognitive and motivational factors are likely to affect the source to which a potential influencer attributes an identified attitude or behavior change.

Moderators of an Attribution to External Forces

Cognitive Biases That Overweight Dispositional Attributions

The question of whether a given behavior is attributed to internal or external forces has typically been asked with respect to the perceptions of outside observers, most notably in paradigms related to the fundamental attribution error (Jones & Harris, 1967) or correspondence bias (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). These paradigms have famously demonstrated that outside observers are more likely to say that another person's behavior is dispositionally driven than situationally driven. Indeed, these same factors are likely to play a role in the attributions made by a potential influence source; thus, one may assume that a potential influence source will be generally biased in the direction of assuming that others' actions are the result of internal factors. However, there are notable

motivational and perceptual differences between the perspectives of an outside observer and a potential influence source that may differentially affect their attributions. Thus, while outside observers are generally predisposed to assume others' behavior is internally driven, rather than externally driven, a potential influence source may not share this bias to the same degree. Considerations particular to the role of influence source will be discussed in the next section on determining the specific external source to which a behavior or attitude change is attributed.

Cognitive Biases That Overweight Extrinsic Incentives

Other research has found that outside observers tend to overweight extrinsic as opposed to intrinsic incentives when predicting and interpreting others' behavior (Heath, 1999; Miller & Ratner, 1998). For example, in a series of studies by Heath (1999), participants thought their peers' career choices were motivated primarily by pay and other extrinsic incentives (e.g., title, job security) rather than intrinsic incentives such as learning new things. And in other research, participants have been found to attribute others' prosocial actions (e.g., donating blood) to monetary incentives rather than intrinsic charitable motivations. Heath (1999) has argued that these findings differ from traditional actor–observer effects (e.g., Jones & Harris, 1967) in part because of the salient incentives, particularly money, used in such paradigms. For these reasons, the general bias towards dispositional explanations may in fact reverse when an influencer attempts to influence a target using salient extrinsic incentives. For example, someone who complies with a request in the absence of money may be viewed as doing so because of an internal desire to do so, but someone who complies with a request in exchange for a monetary incentive may be viewed as doing so because of external forces, i.e., to receive the payment (see also Bohns, Newark, & Xu, 2016).

Qualities of the Target

Finally, some targets, as a result of particular qualities they possess, are more likely to be viewed as acting of their own accord, and their behavior is therefore more likely to receive an internal attribution. For example, research has found that more powerful and/or high-status individuals are more likely to be viewed as acting of their own volition (Overbeck, Tiedens, & Brion, 2006). So, a higher status employee seen working late is more likely to be viewed as doing so because she wanted to, rather than because she has been asked. Similarly, targets who are more likely to be objectified and dehumanized, such as women and out-group members, are perceived to possess less agency, leading perceived behavioral changes to be viewed as being more externally, rather than internally, caused (Bohns & Flynn, 2013; Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, & Barrett, 2011; Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008).

WAS THE CHANGE THE RESULT OF SOMETHING I SAID OR DID? ATTRIBUTION TO SELF

Once a behavior or attitude change has been detected and it has been determined that the change was likely due to external (rather than internal) forces, the third and final question a potential influence source must answer is whether *oneself* is the specific external source responsible for the change. As with the preceding questions, various features of the interaction are likely to impact whether a potential influence source determines that he or she is ultimately responsible for the other person's behavior or attitude change.

Moderators of an Attribution to Self

Egocentric Biases That Cause Potential Influencers to Overestimate their Influence

In most cases of behavior and attitude change, there are multiple potential influence sources. A decision-maker will often consult with multiple friends and acquaintances for advice. An individual's attitudes are also shaped by things he or she reads or sees. In general, any interaction a person has is both preceded and followed by numerous interactions with other people and potential sources of information.

Nonetheless, a potential influence source may overestimate his or her influence on a target because he or she is not aware of these other potential sources of influence or does not fully consider the extent to which one of these other sources may have impacted a target. Furthermore, there are documented egocentric biases that are likely to cause potential influencers to overestimate the extent to which their actions are noticed by others – and may therefore lead them to overestimate the impact of their own influence on others. In particular, a bias known as the “spotlight effect” describes people's tendency to think others notice their behaviors and features to which they are particularly attuned, for example, tripping and falling or wearing an embarrassing outfit, more than others actually do (Epley, Savitsky, & Gilovich, 2002; Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000; Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999). Thus, one's own behavior – and its potential impact on others – may loom larger than the variety of alternative influencers. For example, a potential influencer may be more likely to think an embarrassing gaffe on his or her part is what ultimately caused an influencee to move away or switch seats.

Egocentric Biases That Cause Potential Influencers to Underestimate Their Influence

On the other hand, there are documented egocentric biases that would make the opposite prediction – that we are likely to underestimate the extent to which others are attuned to our behavior, and therefore underestimate our influence. For example, research by Boothby, Clark, and Bargh (2017) has demonstrated that we tend to assume that others are paying *less* attention to us than they in fact are, a bias they describe as akin to believing one is wearing an “invisibility cloak.” In these studies, participants, whether in a bustling dining hall or a quiet

waiting room with just one other person, believed that they were being noticed and observed less than they actually were. These researchers have reconciled their findings with the spotlight effect by demonstrating that people tend to overestimate the extent to which a particularly embarrassing behavior or feature is noticed by others, but underestimate the extent to which they are generally noticed by others when going about their daily lives. Thus, while we may overestimate the extent to which our embarrassing gaffes influence others, we may underestimate the effect of more subtle, everyday forms of influence, such as one's mere presence, or brief, seemingly insignificant interactions with strangers.

A different, but related, kind of bias finds that people generally underestimate the role of social factors in determining others' behaviors. Nolan and colleagues (2008) showed this with respect to outside observers who tended to discount the effectiveness of normative social influence (as opposed to informational influence; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Rader, Larrick, & Soll, 2017) on targets' behavior. While information about their neighbors' behavior had a larger impact on participants' actual energy consumption than information about the link between energy consumption and climate change, participants expected the latter information to be more effective at motivating others' energy consumption. Notably, Flynn and Lake (Bohns) (2008) found a similar bias on the part of influencers. In these studies, participants consistently and substantially underestimated the likelihood that others would comply with their direct, face-to-face requests, because they underestimated the power of the strong social forces that drive people to say "yes" (by making it awkward and uncomfortable to say "no") in these situations. These findings have since been replicated and extended in numerous follow-up studies (Bohns et al., 2011, 2016, 2014; Newark, Bohns, & Flynn, 2017; Newark, Flynn, & Bohns, 2014; Roghanizad & Bohns, 2017). This underestimation-of-compliance effect, like the invisibility cloak, would predict an overall tendency to underestimate one's influence over others.

The Influencer's Motivations

A variety of motivations on the part of the influencer can play a role in determining whether he or she attributes a behavior or attitude to his or her own influence. Unlike an outside observer, an influence source is an active participant in the very situation they are interpreting (Neisser, 1980). This unique perspective means that influence sources are more "cognitively busy" managing their own impressions and other aspects of the situation than an outside observer would be (Gilbert et al., 1988). It also means that they have a stake in the final attribution that is made, e.g., deciding they are responsible for someone else's positive attitude change, or their bad behavior, which is likely to motivate their attributions for the self-serving reasons described earlier (Arkin et al., 1980; Bradley, 1978; Heider, 1958; Johnson et al., 1964; Kelley, 1967; Markman & Tetlock, 2000). If the behavior, attitude, or decision change in question is positive, a potential influence source may be motivated to view him or herself as the primary contributor to the change, whereas if it is negative, a potential influence

source may be motivated to attribute the change, if not to internal factors, to another external factor (e.g., another person, stressful circumstances).

Other motivations on the part of the influencer include the control motivations described earlier. People are generally motivated to believe that they have control over their environment (Fiske, 2002; Kelley, 1973). As such, they claim to have more control than they can realistically have over chance outcomes (Langer, 1975; Langer & Roth, 1975) and collectively derived outcomes (Kruger & Savitsky, 2009). These same motivations are likely to play a role when claiming responsibility for others' behavior, particularly when an influence attempt is intentional and noticeable (Schaerer, Tost, Huang, Gino, & Larrick, 2018). In such circumstances, a potential influencer may therefore over-claim responsibility for another person's behavior or attitude.

On the other hand, research on politeness and "face" (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978; Goffman, 1971) suggests that people prefer to feel as if they are not pressuring others. To preserve face for oneself and one's interaction partner, the expectation is that we should take pains to maintain at least the appearance that the other party has autonomy and is complying with any request we make of his own accord. For this reason, a request such as "Can you please close the door?" is considered more polite than a directive such as "Close the door." In fact, perhaps for this reason, Flynn and Lake (Bohns) (2008) have shown that when making a request, people believe that their indirect requests (e.g., hints) will be more effective at garnering compliance when in fact direct requests are far more effective. This desire to feel one is not pressuring others may override, or at least attenuate, the desire to feel one is in control of one's environment when it comes to determining one's responsibility over human, rather than non-human, outcomes.

DISCUSSION

We have proposed a model of how a potential influencer is likely to determine whether he or she is responsible for another person's change in behavior or attitude. As part of this model, we have reviewed a series of perceptual, motivational, and cognitive factors that we argue are likely to impact when people recognize, or fail to recognize, the extent of their influence over others' behavior and attitudes. These factors can be used to determine when an influencer is likely to overclaim, underclaim, or accurately claim responsibility for a target's behavior or attitude, which in turn could impact an influencer's choice of influence tactic. Here we turn to a discussion of some ancillary factors that are also likely to affect how accurately an individual perceives his or her influence, as well as discussion of the cumulative context within which any single influence attempt occurs, and what it means to be "accurate" about one's influence over another person.

Ancillary Modes of Influence and Ancillary Outcomes

Throughout this paper, we have focused on primary modes of influence such as direct requests, intended hints, imploring gestures, or imploring facial

expressions. But in addition to the things we explicitly say and do to try to influence others, there are numerous more subtle forms of potential influence of which we may be less cognizant. These include our physical beauty and other physical traits, dress, voice attributes, odor, and mannerisms. When considering the impact of our words, we may be inclined to think that what we say is all that matters, forgetting that how we say it – with what tone of voice, with what facial expression, from what physical distance – may matter a great deal.

Just as there are more minor modes of influence, there are also secondary outcomes of influence. When we ask a seated passenger to give up his subway seat we are on the lookout for whether our request caused him to give up his subway seat, and so we may be less attuned to the fact that our request may have caused him to experience certain emotions (e.g., guilt for saying no). Attempts to influence behaviors may inadvertently influence attitudes, and vice versa. Attempts to influence attitudes or behaviors may inadvertently increase or decrease emotions and affective states, such as stress. The full web of modes and outcomes of influence is considerably complex.

Cumulative Influence

For the sake of simplicity, our theory has focused on potential influencers' interpretations of single influence attempts or events: Did my friend take the advice I gave her last week? Did my impassioned speech change my mentee's opinion? However, actual influence is often more complex than a single response to a single event. Many forms of attitude or behavior change take place within a broader social context and may result from an accumulation of influence attempts over time. A person may not change her deeply held beliefs following a single conversation; however, she might change her beliefs after hearing the same message repeatedly from multiple influence sources.

Potential influencers, as well, may perceive their own attempts at influence as a cumulative process: Has my son finally listened to what I've been telling him all along? Was the tenth appeal for more staff the one that finally led my boss to this hiring decision? Thus, a question for future research and theorizing is whether potential influencers accurately perceive how influence accumulates over time.

What Does It Mean to Be "Accurate" about One's Influence over Another Person?

Inherent to a discussion of "accurate" and "inaccurate" perceptions of the effectiveness of one's influence is an assumption that there is some true, objective understanding of what influenced another person. However, what actually influenced someone and by how much is rarely clear, sometimes even to the person whose attitude or behavior has changed. Someone who experiences a change of heart or a behavioral shift cannot always clearly dole out responsibility for that shift. For example, the same motivations that might lead a target to conceal the impact of a given piece of advice from a potential influencer might similarly

lead a target to conceal the impact of that same piece of advice from him or herself. Thus, while we refer to the “accuracy” of influencers’ judgments of their own influence, in many cases we can really only compare one person’s (the influencer’s) perception to another’s (the target’s) perception, not to some objective reality.

CONCLUSION

We regularly try to determine the impact of our words, actions, and presence on other people: Did he notice that I wasn’t there today? Was she offended by my comment? Did he take my advice to heart? Yet, how people go about making such determinations has largely been neglected, despite extensive literatures on social influence and responsibility or blame attribution. On the other hand, we regularly impact people in ways we are not aware of. Yet, there is little if any literature addressing the question of when we are likely to recognize or fail to recognize the influence we have on others. This paper offers a starting point for exploring these questions. We have proposed a model of how an individual is likely to determine his or her degree of responsibility for someone else’s behavior or attitude, which includes a series of cognitive, motivational, and perceptual considerations that we believe to be both unique and critical to the process of determining or recognizing one’s influence over, and responsibility for, others’ behavior and attitudes.

NOTE

1. We note that “changes” here includes “strengthens” and “enforces,” not merely “reverses” or “alters.”

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