

Culpable Control and the Psychology of Blame

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A culpable control model is advanced to describe the conditions that encourage as well as mitigate blame and to assess the process by which blame and mitigation occur. The fundamental assumptions of the model are that evidence concerning harmful events is scrutinized for its contribution to personal control and spontaneously evaluated for its favorableness or unfavorableness. Spontaneous evaluations encourage a blame-validation mode of processing in which evidence concerning the event is reviewed in a manner that favors ascribing blame to the person or persons who evoke the most negative affect or whose behavior confirms unfavorable expectations. The author delineates the elements of perceived control and then discusses spontaneous evaluation influences on control and blame assessments. The blame-validation process is described next. Finally, the culpable control model is compared with extant theories of blame and responsibility and its basic tenets summarized.

All social groups are concerned with detecting and discouraging harmful behavior. To maintain social order, people who commit ethical, moral, and/or legal transgressions must be held accountable for their actions. The identification of wrongdoing and harm-doers is no less important in our personal lives, where people must ascertain which interaction partners will hinder their goals or threaten their well-being. Whereas legal transgressors are subject to imprisonment and monetary penalties, social transgressors who commit malevolent, selfish, or thoughtless deeds are maligned or ostracized. Underlying most social sanctions is the determination that a person is blameworthy for harmful or potentially harmful actions.

Blame is an aspect of everyday conduct evaluation that identifies behavior as morally wrong or socially opprobrious. The assumption that blame entails moral or social wrongdoing differentiates it from kindred concepts such as legal responsibility. Many of the misdeeds people commit in ordinary social life, such as being selfish, inconsiderate, or rude, are beyond the pale of criminal or civil responsibility. Furthermore, people can be held legally responsible on the basis of strict liability statutes without committing social or moral offenses (cf. Hart's [1968] "liability" responsibility; Low, Jeffries, & Bonnie, 1986). An example of strict liability is a manager of a food plant being held responsible for distributing tainted meat, despite having assiduously followed safety precautions. Finally, whereas normative models based on jurisprudence and moral philosophy specify rational criteria for responsibility, blame is an inherently psychological construct. Pre-disposing biases, which represent departures from normative responsibility models, are endemic to ordinary blame ascription. For this reason, the psychological processes manifested in cognitive and motivational biases are central rather than peripheral to the psychology of blame.

Previous research on blame reflects diverse concerns. A preponderance of the early work in this area focused on the motivational

assumptions of the defensive attribution (Burger, 1981; Shaver, 1970) and just-world (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978) hypotheses. A second line of research has investigated psychological issues such as eyewitness identification (Buckhout, 1974; Leippe, 1980; Loftus, 1979), jury decision making (Kaplan & Schersching, 1981; Pennington & Hastie, 1986, 1992), and scientific jury selection (Padawer-Singer, Singer, & Singer, 1974; Penrod & Cutler, 1987; Suggs & Sales, 1978). Research on specific crimes such as drunk driving or acquaintance rape and specific defenses such as insanity or diminished capacity also fits into this category.

Other topics that have fallen within the purview of blame research include the effects of outcome information on blame ascriptions (see, e.g., Alicke & Davis, 1989; Alicke, Davis, & Pezzo, 1994; Baron & Hershey, 1988); how blame or responsibility attributions are influenced by physical, demographic, or personality characteristics of the observer, perpetrator, or victim (see, e.g., Berg & Vidmar, 1975; Efran, 1974; Kalven & Zeisel, 1966; Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976; Nemeth & Sosis, 1973; Sigall & Ostrove, 1975; Sosis, 1974); and how specific criteria such as causal impact (see, e.g., Brickman, Ryan, & Wortman, 1975; Johnson, Ogawa, Delforge, & Early, 1989; McGraw, 1987; Shultz & Schleifer, 1983; Shultz, Schleifer, & Altman, 1981), foresight of the consequences (see, e.g., Karlovac & Darley, 1988; Wortman & Linder, 1979), intervening causation (see, e.g., Fincham & Roberts, 1985; Fincham & Shultz, 1981), intention and motive (see, e.g., Masselli & Altrocchi, 1969; Shultz & Wells, 1985), and mitigating circumstances (see, e.g., Alicke, 1994; Schlenker, 1980; Snyder, Higgins, & Stuckey, 1983) are used in blame ascriptions.

Research in each of the aforementioned areas has focused on relatively specific facets of blaming. Defensive attribution research, for example, has concentrated on accidental events and is therefore less relevant to intentional wrongdoing. Psychological studies have been predominantly concerned with practical issues in the judicial system and in the jury decision-making process. Outcome bias and counterfactual reasoning research has focused on event outcomes rather than on blame criteria such as intention, foresight, causation, and mitigating circumstances. The main focus of individual difference studies has been to demonstrate moderating

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influences of factors such as authoritarianism and locus of control beliefs on blame or responsibility judgments. Finally, research investigating specific blame criteria, although helpful in identifying the components of blame, has provided few clues about the interrelationship among these components or about the process by which blame attributions are made.

Theoretical perspectives on blame and responsibility are dominated by normative decision-stage models that prescribe how blame judgments should be made by rational perceivers. The criteria at each decision stage range from relatively objective conditions such as association and causation to more subjective judgments of foresight and intention. In Heider's (1958) levels of responsibility model, for example, responsibility judgments proceed from considerations of association, commission, foreseeability, and intentionality to the final stage of mitigating or extenuating circumstances. Roughly the same levels characterize Piaget's (1932) developmental model of moral reasoning. Fincham and Shultz's (1981; Shultz et al., 1981) entailment model is more concise, simply stating that blame (or responsibility) entails a determination of causal involvement and that punishment entails the presumption of blame. Weiner's (1995) model also follows the main precepts of stage theories, namely, that responsibility assessments begin with an evaluation of personal or impersonal causation (based on an analysis of intent) and then consider the extent to which the actor controlled the harmful outcomes and whether mitigating circumstances existed. Finally, Shaver's (1985) model, which represents the most comprehensive perspective on blame to date, divides blame attributions into sequential stages of causal attribution, responsibility attribution, and finally, blame. In Shaver's model, moral responsibility is the penultimate stage of blame ascription at which an actor is charged with knowingly and voluntarily committing a social or moral transgression. Blame ascriptions, however, require the further step of eliminating acceptable excuses or justifications.

Stage theories outline the criteria involved in blame ascription but are generally less concerned with the cognitive and affective factors that influence the way these criteria are evaluated. In this regard, stage theories tend to be prescriptive rather than explanatory. As Shaver (1985) states about his model:

It is not claimed either that all perceivers will follow this model or that any individual perceiver will follow the pattern specified by the model in all of his or her judgments of blame. What is asserted is that deviations from the model are more likely to involve errors than are judgments that follow the pattern implied by the model. (p. 167)

Decision-stage models, therefore, prescribe the factors a rational perceiver should consider in assessing blame but do not account for psychological processes that produce deviations from rational expectations. Because cognitive shortcomings and motivational biases are endemic to blame, a psychological treatment of this topic requires a model in which personal expectations and emotional reactions are central components.

In this article, I outline a culpable control model of blame. The goal of this model is to provide an integrative scheme for conceptualizing the multifarious topics related to blame attribution. The culpable control model delineates the conditions that increase as well as mitigate blame and analyzes the process by which blame and mitigation decisions are made. Although I borrow concepts from legal and moral philosophy and use numerous legal examples

throughout, the culpable control model is ultimately geared to the explanation of ordinary conduct evaluation.

The control aspect of the culpable control model entails the freedom to effect desired behaviors and outcomes or to avoid undesired ones (Berofsky, 1966; Fischer, 1986; Melden, 1961). Personal control is diminished to the extent that behavioral options or alternative outcomes are foreclosed. Different aspects of personal control can be identified by assessing the relationship among three basic elements of behavior sequences: mental states, behaviors, and consequences. The mental element encompasses people's desires, plans, motives, and knowledge. The behavioral element includes actions and omissions to act. The consequence element comprises immediate and extended behavioral outcomes.

Figure 1 shows that the connections among the mental, behavioral, and consequence elements yield three structural links: a link between mind and behavior, one between behavior and consequence, and one between mind and consequence. I use the term structural link simply to distinguish the structural components of personal control from the process by which personal control assessments influence blame. Each structural link provides information about a different facet of personal control. The mind-to-behavior link yields information about *volitional behavior control*, which refers to whether a person's actions were freely chosen or compelled. The behavior-to-consequence link yields information about the actor's *causal control*, which refers to the actor's unique impact on harmful consequences. Finally, the mind-to-consequence link is informative of *volitional outcome control*, which indicates whether the consequences were desired and whether they occurred as anticipated.

The culpable control model differs from extant blame theories by conceptualizing criteria such as intention, causation, and foresight in terms of personal control. Intention is an aspect of volitional behavior control. A person who behaves accidentally, or whose behavior is constrained by internal incapacities or external forces, possesses low volitional behavior control. Causation is synonymous with causal control. Factors that attenuate the causal connection between the actor's behavior and its consequences diminish causal control. Foresight is an aspect of volitional outcome control. Volitional outcome control is reduced by the failure to anticipate harmful consequences due to unforeseen circumstances. In sum, factors that establish personal control intensify blame attributions whereas constraints on personal control potentially mitigate blame.

Personal control provides an overarching scheme for integrating diverse blame criteria. Viewing blame from the personal control perspective helps organize the various conditions that exacerbate or mitigate blame. Furthermore, in contrast to technical legal concepts, virtually all observers are acquainted with the idea of controlling events. Philosophers (e.g., Collingwood, 1940) have argued that the ordinary experience of exerting control is the basis from which people conceptualize more technical concepts such as causation. Others have argued that causal analysis is important only to the extent that it elucidates personal control (Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy & Doherty, 1994). In this regard, Kelley (1972) has stated that "the purpose of causal analysis—the function it serves for the species and the individual—is effective control" (p. 23). The emphasis on personal control also accords with Heider's (1958) belief that ordinary language concepts should anchor attributional theories.

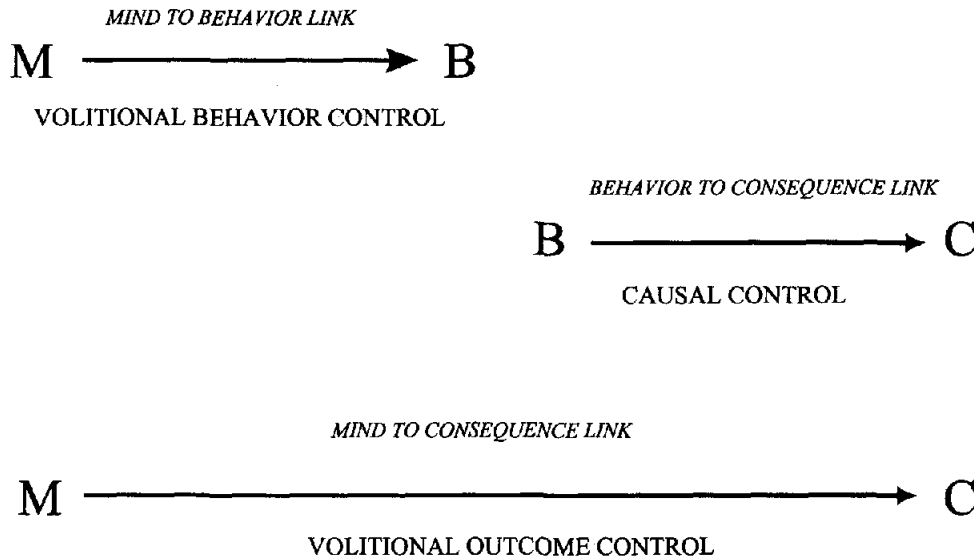


Figure 1. Structural linkages among mental, behavioral, and consequence elements. B = behavioral element; C = consequence element; M = mental element.

The structural links represent the information that moral and legal philosophers endorse for ascribing blame and responsibility. Because people are socialized to predicate blame on criteria such as intention, causation, and foresight, the culpable control model assumes that observers consciously and deliberately assess the structural linkages (i.e., volitional and causal control). This aspect of the culpable control model is consistent with most extant theories of blame and responsibility. However, the culpable control model diverges from current theories in emphasizing that personal control judgments and blame attributions are influenced by relatively unconscious, spontaneous evaluations of the mental, behavioral, and consequence elements.¹ Spontaneous evaluations are affective reactions to the harmful event and the people involved. These reactions occur in response to evidential structural linkage information concerning a person's intentions, behaviors, or the consequences they produce, or in response to extraevidential factors such as a person's social attractiveness, reputation, or social category.

According to the culpable control model, negative spontaneous evaluations contribute to a *blame-validation* mode of structural linkage assessment. When a blame-validation mode is engaged, observers review structural linkage evidence in a biased manner by exaggerating the actor's volitional or causal control, by lowering their evidential standards for blame, or by seeking information to support their blame attribution. In addition to spontaneous evaluation influences, blame-validation processing is facilitated by factors such as the tendencies to overascribe control to human agency and to confirm unfavorable expectations. As a result of blame-validation processing, observers are inclined to blame the actor or actors who arouse the most negative affect or whose behavior confirms unfavorable expectations. The phrase culpable control reflects the assumption that observers' proclivity to blame, based on their expectations and affective reactions, is conflated with their assessments of personal control. In other words, personal control judgments, which encompass the prescribed elements for blame in

virtually all existing theories, are influenced by observers' spontaneous reactions to the event and the people involved. As described in greater detail later, these spontaneous reactions influence blame directly as well as indirectly by altering perceptions of causal and volitional control.

The assumption that observers process structural linkage information in a blame-validation mode is one way in which the culpable control model diverges from the rational prescriptions delineated in moral philosophy and Anglo American jurisprudence, and stipulated in normative models of blame. Whereas legal decision makers are entreated to withhold judgment until all relevant evidence has been considered, the assumption that people engage in blame-validation processing suggests that blame is the default attribution and that adjustments for mitigating circumstances are often insufficient.

The culpable control model also departs from most current blame and responsibility theories by according a central rather than a peripheral role to the judgmental biases that derive from blame-validation processing. Instead of treating blame-validation influences as exceptions to rational norms, the culpable control model treats these effects as inherent aspects of blame ascription. By distinguishing between relatively deliberate structural linkage assessments and more affectively charged spontaneous evaluations, the culpable control model combines normative blame theories (see, e.g., Darley & Shultz, 1990; Fincham & Jaspars, 1980; Fincham & Shultz, 1981; Heider, 1958; Shaver, 1985; Shultz & Schleifer, 1983; Weiner, 1995) with theories that emphasize motivational factors (see, e.g., Lerner & Miller, 1978; Shaver, 1970). Whereas normative models prescribe the steps a perfectly rational

¹ A purely unconscious process precludes conscious awareness (Bargh, 1989). I use the phrase relatively unconscious, therefore, to convey that spontaneous evaluations tend to be less conscious than structural linkage assessments but not completely outside awareness.

observer would pursue to assess blame, the culpable control model integrates rational analysis with cognitive and affectively based biases. Few attribution researchers, of course, believe observers are perfectly rational. In fact, the same theorists who propound logical models have shown how observers deviate from these models (see, e.g., Shaver, 1970). A fundamental assumption of the culpable control model is that relatively unconscious spontaneous evaluations influence blame attributions both directly as well as indirectly by means of their effect on more deliberate structural linkage assessments.

The remainder of this article is divided into four sections. The first section examines structural linkage assessments independently of spontaneous evaluations. The second section considers spontaneous evaluation influences on personal control and blame estimations. The third section assesses factors that contribute to blame-validation processing. The final section compares the culpable control model with other theories of blame and responsibility and summarizes its main assumptions.

Structural Linkage Assessment

This section describes factors involved in assessing causal and volitional control. Although the culpable control model assumes that conduct evaluations are typically determined by the interactive influence of spontaneous evaluations and structural linkage assessments, it is useful to examine structural linkage analyses separately before introducing spontaneous evaluation complexities.

In common with virtually all blame and responsibility theories (see, e.g., Fincham & Jaspars, 1980; Schlenker et al., 1994; Shaver, 1985; Shultz & Schleifer, 1983; Weiner, 1995), the culpable control model addresses circumstances in which the actor's behavioral participation is unambiguous. In other words, the central question in the psychology of blame is not whether a behavior occurred but whether the actor is to blame for what occurred. This contrasts with legal responsibility in which the actor may completely deny involvement in the harmful event.

In contrast to blame and responsibility models that adhere to philosophical conventions in positing the presence or absence of intention, motive, foresight, and causation, the culpable control model allows for graded control assessments. Instead of making dichotomous judgments, observers are believed to estimate the degree to which the actor desired, caused, or foresaw the harmful outcomes and to consider the extent to which constraining forces altered the event. This graded assessment acknowledges, for example, that intentional behavior varies in its planfulness, that causal impact may be relatively weak or strong, and that an actor's foresight ranges from a vague premonition of harmful consequences to clear recognition of the potential for harm.

Personal control is maximized by the actor's willful causal impact on harmful consequences. Willfulness pertains to both volitional behavior control and volitional outcome control. Regarding the former, willfulness refers to the purposeful versus accidental nature of the actor's behavior, whereas for the latter, willfulness refers to whether the outcomes of the event occurred in the manner the actor desired and anticipated. Causal impact pertains to causal control. The actor's causal impact is heightened to the extent that her behavior uniquely and effectively engendered harmful consequences.

Personal control is potentially diminished when constraining forces prevent the actor from pursuing her most highly valued behavioral alternatives or from achieving a desired outcome in the anticipated manner. Forces that reduce personal control are divided into capacity and situational constraints. This distinction corresponds to legal classifications of diminished responsibility on the one hand and justification and situational excuse on the other. Constraints prevent people from acting on their desires in two basic ways. One class of constraints completely negates control, such as when behavior is physically or psychologically compelled. An epileptic, for example, has virtually no control over her actions during a seizure. However, most constraints reduce control partially rather than completely. A second class of constraints permits the opportunity to surmount personal or environmental obstacles. A dieter, for example, can stiffen his resolve instead of succumbing to temptation. A clerk threatened at gunpoint can try to resist. Examples of capacity and situational constraints that potentially diminish personal control are presented in Figure 2.

In addition to assessing constraints that impede the ability to control the present event, observers may consider the process by which constraints evolved. *Process control* refers to the etiology of capacity or situational constraints. Observers may be less willing to accept emotional stress as an excuse for rude behavior, for example, if they believe the actor was responsible for creating the stress that induced rudeness.

Each structural link is elaborated separately below followed by a discussion of process control.

The Mind-to-Behavior Link: Volitional Behavior Control

Volitional Behavior Control Criteria

Volitional behavior control varies according to the degree to which actors are perceived to have behaved purposely and knowingly. Acting on purpose rather than by accident signifies that the behavior was one the actor desired in the situation. For example, a recovering alcoholic who falls off the wagon may lament his weakness in taking a drink, but the act of drinking is nevertheless purposeful in the situation.

Besides the distinction of whether behavior occurred accidentally or purposely, further gradations in purposefulness depend on the degree to which an action seemed planned, as well as on the progress the actor has made in achieving a behavioral goal. Research shows that increased planfulness enhances perceived responsibility for both criminal (Roberts & Golding, 1991) and civil (Fincham & Emery, 1988; Fincham & Roberts, 1985; Roberts, Golding, & Fincham, 1987) offenses. Although research relating progress toward a goal to blameworthiness is lacking, it seems reasonable to assume that actors who come closer to realizing their harmful intentions will be seen to have exerted more volitional behavior control, and will be deemed more blameworthy, than those who are in the initial stages of their goal pursuit.

The knowledge component entails the actor's ability to understand the meaning of her actions. Volitional behavior control is reduced, therefore, to the extent that people fail to appreciate what their actions signify. Knowledge failures may occur because of misunderstanding of social norms, failure to learn cultural rules and acquire general skills, or in more extreme cases, cognitive

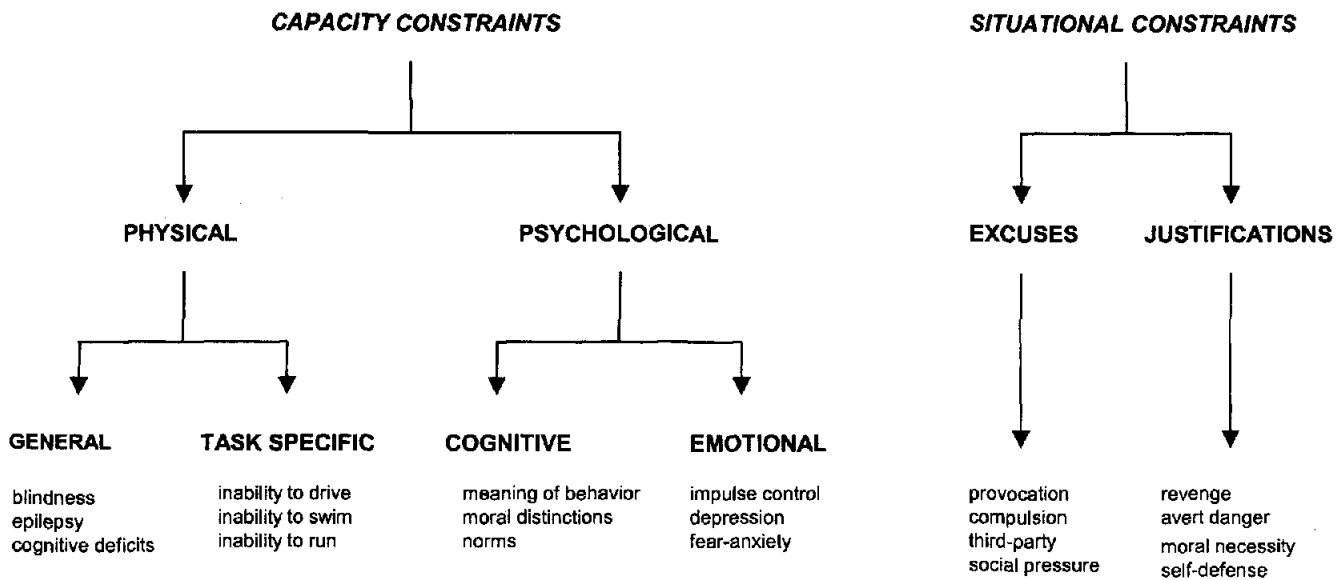


Figure 2. Examples of capacity and situational constraints on personal control.

disorders. Failure to learn cultural norms is exemplified by a person inadvertently offending an acquaintance with a blasphemous comment. An example of neglecting to learn rules or skills is a driver failing to stop for a school bus. Some information and skills are required of virtually all adults whereas others pertain only to people in special roles (Schlenker et al., 1994). A physician, for example, might be blamed for failing to intervene in a medical emergency whereas a person with no special medical skills would be excused.

Constraints on Volitional Behavior Control

Volitional behavior control is diminished by both capacity and situational constraints. Capacity constraints derive from physical or psychological disorders or limitations that hinder the ability to pursue one's desires or to appreciate the meaning of behavior. Physical incapacities have a known or presumed physiological or anatomical basis. Examples include physical infirmities and sensory deficits (e.g., poor eyesight or hearing). Psychological incapacities include cognitive and emotional limitations that promote undesired behaviors or inhibit desired ones. In the law, psychological incapacities are represented by the insanity and diminished capacity defenses. In ordinary circumstances, undesirable traits, habits, and incapacities may also be viewed as psychological incapacities deserving of mitigation. Examples include a forgetful person being excused for missing a spouse's birthday, a poor but enthusiastic cook for ruining a meal, and a person with a bad sense of direction for missing an appointment. According to the culpable control model, whether mitigation actually occurs for these misdeeds depends, in addition to control estimations, on observers' spontaneous reactions to the actor's traits and the outcomes they engender.

Situational constraints are exemplified by the legal defenses of situational excuse and justification. The distinction between excuses and justifications has been discussed extensively by legal philosophers (e.g., Austin, 1956), sociologists (e.g., Scott & Ly-

man, 1968), and self-presentation theorists (e.g., Schlenker, 1980, 1982; Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Snyder et al., 1983). Excuses admit wrongdoing while seeking mitigation due to diminished control. Excuses are expressed in statements such as "I couldn't help it," "I didn't mean to," "I wasn't myself," and "I was forced to."

Whereas excuses admit wrongdoing, justifications emphasize the positive features of ostensibly harmful actions. In the common-law tradition, justifications are said to represent choice-of-evils dilemmas, or what psychologists would call avoidance-avoidance conflicts. The justification defense argues that, given the alternatives, the defendant's behavioral choice was the most reasonable one in the situation. Legal examples of justification include behaviors purportedly required to protect the well-being of another individual (e.g., kidnapping a child from a religious cult), of oneself (e.g., self-defense), or of society (e.g., participating in an illegal demonstration).

Even when capacity or situational constraints are conspicuous, observers may consider whether the actor would have enacted the same behavior if the constraints were weaker or absent. *Effective volitional behavior control* is maximized when constraints fail to alter the actor's behavior in the situation. Effective volitional behavior control can be understood in terms of a philosophical distinction between first- and second-order desires (Frankfurt, 1971). A first-order desire reflects an immediate reaction to constraining forces. A pilot who is forced to make a dangerous landing by a hijacker has a first-order desire to comply with the hijacker's request. Second-order desires derive from evaluations of first-order desires. Most pilots evaluate dangerous landings unfavorably and therefore have second-order desires to avoid danger. A pilot who is planning to commit suicide, however, might secretly welcome the opportunity to crash the plane. First-order and second-order desires are consistent when people evaluate their responses to constraining conditions favorably and inconsistent when constraints force them to do things they dislike. Contented drug

addicts, for example, have consistent first- and second-order desires whereas regretful addicts have inconsistent desires. People possess more effective volitional behavior control, therefore, when their first- and second-order desires are consistent than when they are inconsistent.

The Behavior-to-Consequence Link: Causal Control

Causal Control Criteria

Causal control is defined in terms of the actor's impact on the harmful outcomes. Causal impact, in turn, depends on the uniqueness of the actor's contribution, the sufficiency of his behavior for the outcomes, the proximity of his behavior in the chain of events that produced those outcomes, and the probability that the harmful outcomes would have been averted or diminished without his intervention.

Uniqueness. Uniqueness entails the number of causal forces that contribute to the event. As the attributional discounting principle suggests (Kelley, 1972), multiple causes ambiguate personal attributions by providing alternative explanations for behavior. The task of identifying a particular actor's blameworthiness is similarly complicated by multiple causal forces. However, the number of causal forces exerted on the harmful outcome becomes less important when the actor's behavior is sufficient to produce harm. For example, if the actor kills a rival by cutting the brake lines in his car, it matters less that other causes, such as bad weather conditions, contributed to his demise (Bindra, Clarke, & Shultz, 1980; McGill, 1998; McGraw, 1987).

Proximity. Another determinant of perceived causal impact is causal proximity, which refers to the temporal or spatial distance between a causal factor and its consequences (Hart & Honore, 1959; Prosser & Wade, 1971). Temporal proximity involves the latency between an antecedent event and its consequences whereas spatial proximity refers to the position of a causal factor in the chain of events. Temporal proximity of an antecedent event to harmful outcomes increases its causal candidacy by heightening its salience or by increasing perceptions of temporal contiguity (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1986). Research on spatial proximity suggests that early events in a causal sequence are perceived to exert greater influence, especially when the events are arranged in a causal chain in which each prior event leads directly to the next (Brickman et al., 1975; Johnson et al., 1989; Miller & Gunasegaram, 1990; Vinokur & Ajzen, 1982).

Effective causal control. Finally, causal impact assessments entail consideration of alternatives to the harmful outcome, or *effective causal control*. The notion of effective causal control highlights the fact that observers are attuned not only to the actual consequences of behavior but also to the consequences that could have occurred. Consider an example in which Person A switches Person B's prescribed medication with a lethal substance. Consistent with Person A's wishes, Person B takes the medication and dies. Unbeknownst to both parties, however, Person B was allergic to the prescribed medication and would have died anyway. Person A's action was, therefore, unnecessary for Person B's demise. The same analysis applies to omissions. Suppose Person A sees Person B drowning in shallow water but doesn't help him. If Person B was about to die from an aneurysm, Person A's failure to help would be unnecessary for his death. Effective causal control is reduced

when the consequences would have occurred without the actor's intervention (cf. Brewer's [1977] congruence component in her probabilistic formulation of responsibility attribution). As is discussed below, however, negative spontaneous reactions to the actor's behavior can override effective control considerations.

Effective causal control is relevant to counterfactual reasoning research on attributions for harmful outcomes. Roese (1997) has suggested that counterfactual reasoning about harmful events occurs in two stages. In the first stage, harmful outcomes instigate thoughts about how the outcomes could have been avoided. In the second stage, antecedent events that could have obviated the harmful outcomes are accorded causal priority and used as a basis for blaming perpetrators or compensating victims. A study by Wells and Gavanski (1989, Study 1) exemplifies how effective causal control relates to counterfactual reasoning interpretations of perceiving harmful events. Participants in this study read a story in which an employer took an employee to dinner to celebrate her promotion. The employer ordered a dish containing wine to which the employee had a severe allergic reaction and died. In one version of the story, both dishes the employer considered ordering contained wine, whereas in the other, only one contained wine. In the first version, therefore, the woman would have died regardless of which dish the employer ordered, whereas in the second version, the woman would have lived if the employer had selected the dish without wine. Consistent with counterfactual reasoning theory, the employer's ordering decision was accorded higher causal status when it undid the harmful outcome (i.e., in the second story) than when it left the outcome intact.

The culpable control model's interpretation of these findings is similar but simpler, namely, that the employer possessed more effective causal control over the harmful outcome in the one-wine than in the two-wine scenario. Because the employee in the two-wine scenario would have died regardless of which dish he ordered, the employer had no effective causal control in this situation. The difference between the culpable control and counterfactual reasoning interpretations hinges on whether one must assume a motive to undo surprising or harmful outcomes. Whereas the assumption that surprising outcomes motivate thoughts about alternatives is fundamental to counterfactual reasoning theories, the culpable control perspective simply assumes that effective causal control analyses are inherent in structural linkage assessments. In other words, effective causal control estimations occur whenever salient alternatives to harmful outcomes are perceived, regardless of the surprisingness of the outcomes, and without the assumption of a special motive to undo harmful outcomes. In the absence of findings that establish a motive to undo harmful outcomes, the counterfactual reasoning explanation is indistinguishable from the more parsimonious effective causal control notion.

Causal Control and Constraining Conditions

Constraints on causal control are competing causal forces that reduce the actor's unique impact on the harmful outcomes. Alternative causal forces include events that occurred either before or after the actor's behavioral contribution. An example of prior causal forces is an actor insulting a colleague who had already been insulted by five other colleagues that day. These prior insults

would presumably diminish the actor's causal control over the colleague's subsequent emotional tirade.

Causal forces that succeed the actor's behavioral contribution include personal or environmental interventions. An example of a personal intervention is an actor carelessly tossing a lighted cigarette on a pile of leaves and the fire then accelerating when a second party spills gasoline. In this example, the second party's intervention exacerbates the fire's effects and reduces the first party's ultimate causal impact. By substituting a strong breeze for the second party, this same example illustrates an environmental intervention. In these examples, the first party's behavior is a necessary and sufficient cause of the fire, but ensuing events magnify its effects. These later events reduce the actor's sufficiency for the magnitude of the fire that occurred.

The Mind-to-Consequence Link: Volitional Outcome Control

Criteria for Volitional Outcome Control

The main criteria for volitional outcome control are whether the event's consequences were desired and foreseen. As with other structural linkage components, desire and foresight vary by degree. Desires may be completely or partially fulfilled, and the actor may have low or high foresight, ranging from absolutely no anticipation of causing harmful consequences to a lucid premonition of the outcome.

Whereas volitional behavior control and causal control are logically independent, volitional outcome control depends on the other two structural linkages. For example, if volitional behavior control is diminished by incapacities or situational forces, the actor's desires are unlikely to be fulfilled in the outcome. Similarly, if causal control is decreased by personal or environmental interventions, the outcome will probably be unforeseen.

Constraints on Volitional Outcome Control

As the foregoing analysis suggests, volitional outcome control is diminished by the same situational forces and capacity constraints that inhibit volitional behavior control and causal control. For example, a person threatened at gunpoint is not only compelled to enact certain behaviors but also lacks control over their consequences. Similarly, most capacity constraints affect not only behaviors but also behavioral consequences.

The specific ways in which volitional outcome control is diminished depend on whether the desire, anticipation, or both of these criteria are absent. The first alternative represents a situation in which desire is present but anticipation is absent, that is, in which the actor fails to anticipate the process by which desired consequences eventuate. Consider the following example: Person A fires a gun at Person B with the intention of killing him. Fortunately for Person B, the bullet lodges harmlessly in the wall. Unfortunately for Person B, the noise frightens him to death. In this instance, Person A achieved the desired outcome in a circuitous manner.

The second possibility represents the converse situation in which the consequences were anticipated but undesired. An example is a pacifist defending herself by shooting an attacker. Despite wishing to avoid inflicting injury, the pacifist's actions are necessary for self-defense.

According to the third possibility, volitional outcome control is diminished when the harmful consequences were neither anticipated nor desired. However, people who neither desire nor anticipate harmful outcomes may still be perceived to have *effective volitional outcome control* if observers believe they should have anticipated those consequences. Effective volitional outcome control is tantamount to foreseeability. As in the law, ordinary estimations of effective volitional outcome control are likely to consider the likelihood that any reasonable person would have anticipated the harmful consequences. A person who behaves negligently, therefore, will be excused only if observers believe that the consequences could not reasonably have been foreseen.

Process Control

Observers sometimes possess historical data about events preceding the present one, or what I call process control. Process control accounts for the fact that people can be blamed for relinquishing control. A person who causes a fire by locking himself out of the house while an appliance is operating, for example, is responsible for the constraint of the door being locked. Similarly, a person forced into unwanted acts after entering a criminal association is responsible for compromising his freedom. Consistent with the notion of process control, the law stipulates that people who freely embark on criminal actions are responsible even if forced to persevere under duress. Specifically, Section 2.09 (2) of the *Model Penal Code* (American Law Institute, 1962) states that the duress defense is "unavailable if the actor recklessly placed himself in a situation in which it was probable that he would be subjected to duress."

Previous research suggests that process control is an important consideration in perceptions of sexual assault. Studies on acquaintance rape have shown that victims are blamed more if they asked the man out on the date (Bostwick & Delucia, 1992), if they were drinking (Richardson & Campbell, 1982), if they went to the man's apartment (Muehlenhard, Friedman, & Thomas, 1985), if they dressed or acted provocatively (Kanekar, Kolsawalla, & D'Souza, 1981; Schult & Schneider, 1991; Scroggs, 1976), or if they drove on a dangerous route and approached the assailant (Karuza & Carey, 1984).

Process control is also relevant to assessing the impact of capacity constraints on behavior. In particular, people may be blamed for the process by which capacity constraints evolved. Research has shown, for instance, that people with chronic thought disorders are more likely to be excused for harmful actions if they lacked control over the etiology of the disorder than if they contributed to their incapacity by taking drugs (Alicke & Davis, 1990). Similarly, the law in many jurisdictions stipulates that a person who behaves aggressively after voluntarily becoming intoxicated is responsible for her diminished capacity.

The felony-murder law provides another relevant legal example of process control. According to this law, harmdoers are criminally responsible for unintended consequences that occur during, or as a result of, felonious behavior. Although judges attempt to limit the scope of the felony-murder law (Low et al., 1986), only two states (Hawaii and Kentucky) have abandoned it completely. In one representative legal case (*State v. Goodseal*, 1976), the defendant conspired with an exotic dancer to swindle a prospective sexual client. The defendant, Goodseal, was to pretend he was the danc-

er's husband after she had received money from the client but before she was required to have sex. As arranged, the dancer brought the client to her car. The following events then transpired: Goodseal came to the car, opened the door, pointed a gun to scare the client, slipped in the snow, accidentally discharged the gun, and killed the client. Goodseal was convicted of first-degree murder under the felony-murder law.

Relationship Among Control Elements

Combinations of Volitional and Causal Control

Observers typically use more than one source of information about control to assess blame. Explaining perceptions of control, therefore, requires assumptions about the relationship among structural linkages. One way to conceptualize the interactive effects of volitional behavior control, causal control, and volitional outcome control on blame is to consider all instances in which one or more of the components is present at a high or low level. This conceptualization yields the eight possibilities depicted in Table 1. Personal control is maximized when all three structural linkages are fulfilled (column 1), that is, when the actor purposely (volitional behavior control) and with foresight (volitional outcome control) causes harmful consequences (causal control). Personal control is minimized, on the other hand, when none of the structural linkages are fulfilled (column 8).

Instances in which one or two structural linkages are missing (or present at a very low level) yield numerous distinct personal control scenarios. The second column in Table 1 represents a negligence scenario in which the actor behaves intentionally but causes consequences he neither desired nor foresaw. The third column represents failed attempts to cause harm, which falls within the legal category of inchoate or incomplete offenses. Actors possess no causal or volitional outcome control in cases of abandoned or failed attempts because the harmful outcomes are obviated. Perceived control for such offenses, therefore, depends on observers' estimations of the harmful plan's progress toward completion. Does the volitional behavior control of a woman who plans to rob a bank, for example, increase in gradations by getting into her car, driving to the bank, entering the bank, and proceeding to the teller? American criminal laws treat attempts as crimes when the actor sincerely tries to complete the offense (Low et al., 1986). On the basis of this assumption, one might assume that mitigation for failed attempts will occur more readily when attempts are abandoned voluntarily than when unforeseen circumstances intervene. For example, a person who enters a house with the intent to

burglarize but who has a change of heart and departs will be seen to have exerted less volitional behavior control than one who flees upon hearing a car approach. In practical circumstances, however, correlations between progress toward a goal and degrees of blame are likely to be highly idiosyncratic, depending on observers' personal control theories as well as on their spontaneous reactions to the actor's behavior.

A different variation on the third column of Table 1 represents a situation that is analogous to the legal category of impossible crimes. A representative example involves a case in which the defendant shot a man who was already dead (*People v. Dlugash, 1977*). The constraint in this situation is that the desired outcome—the victim's death—was impossible to achieve. The defendant, therefore, behaved intentionally (volitional behavior control) but possessed neither causal control nor volitional outcome control. Impossible crimes comprise offenses that are factually or legally impossible (Hughes, 1967). Shooting a dead person exemplifies factual impossibility. Legal impossibility applies when the offense, although factually possible, is not criminal. A person who thought he was buying stolen goods could not be prosecuted, for example, if the goods were actually procured legally. Everyday analogues to legal impossibility include the mistaken belief that one's actions are offensive. Imagine, for example, blasting a stereo to annoy a neighbor who happens to love loud music, criticizing a person with low self-esteem who cultivates abuse, and playing a practical joke on an impervious dinner guest by peppering his food. In each case, volitional outcome control is negated by the inability, despite enacting the intended behavior, to effect the desired outcome.

The fourth and seventh columns of Table 1 do not correspond to realistic control scenarios because they stipulate that a person both fails to cause an outcome and foresees the manner in which the outcome occurred.² Column six represents the prototypical accident in which a person unintentionally causes unforeseen outcomes.

Finally, column five of Table 1 represents a highly unusual, but not impossible, situation in which a person's motives accidentally cause the behavior that in turn produces harmful outcomes. A classic example from the philosophy of mind illustrates this possibility:

A woman, while driving down the street, entertains the thought of running over her husband with the car. The thought so unnerves her that she loses control of the wheel and runs over a pedestrian. The pedestrian happens to be her husband.

In this example, the woman unintentionally caused the outcome in the manner she foresaw, although she did not foresee it happening at this time and place. Although volitional behavior control is minimized in this example, observers might nevertheless blame the woman based on process control considerations (that is, for harboring the thoughts that led to the accident).

Table 1
Combinations of Volitional Behavior Control, Causal Control, and Volitional Outcome Control

Structural linkage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Volitional behavior control	X	X	X	X	—	—	—	—
Causal control	X	X	—	—	X	X	—	—
Volitional outcome control	X	—	—	X	X	—	X	—

Note. X = high level of structural link; — = low level or absence of structural link.

² One possible scenario for column 7 involves vicarious blame, such as parents being blamed for the actions of their children. In such circumstances, blame is predicated primarily on assumptions of process control. For example, observers may blame parents of a destructive child for their ineffective, neglectful, or deleterious child-rearing practices.

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Structural Linkage Interdependencies

Structural linkage analyses are interdependent in the sense that assessing one aspect of control may affect estimations of other components. For example, if initial information suggests an actor possessed high causal control over harmful consequences, observers may subsequently exaggerate volitional control information (Alicke, Weigold, & Rogers, 1990). In other words, observers may infer that a person who caused harmful consequences also foresaw their occurrence. Inferring one structural link from another strengthens blame ascriptions.

The tendency to draw inferences between structural links depends on their logical entailment. The knowledge that a person desired an outcome, for example, logically entails (but does not necessitate) that she acted intentionally in pursuing that goal. Logical entailment diminishes, however, if the consequence is disproportionate to the goal. An actor whose goal is to startle a friend by jumping out from behind a bush is unlikely to be seen as having intentionally caused the friend's fatal heart attack.

Structural linkage inferences also depend on the sequence in which information about the harmful event is obtained. Mitigating circumstance information, for example, is more likely to be effective when it is presented early rather than late in the sequence. Consider an example in which the first information observers receive is that a man was jilted by his fiancée on the morning of their wedding. When observers subsequently learn that he was later involved in a car accident, they are more likely to accept emotional stress as a contributing factor (i.e., a reduction in volitional behavior control) than they would if they had learned about the car accident first and mitigating circumstance information later.

Spontaneous Evaluations

Spontaneous evaluations are affective reactions to features of harmful events and the people involved that influence blame attributions either directly or indirectly by altering structural linkage assessments. Affective reactions comprise positive and negative attitudinal judgments about the event and its participants as well as emotional responses that modulate the strength of the spontaneous evaluation. Because observers vary in their attitudes about different events and in the strength of their emotional reactions, individual differences in the way observers spontaneously evaluate harmful events are probably pervasive.

Spontaneous reactions occur in response to both evidential and extraevidential event features. Evidential features pertain to structural linkage elements, that is, to the actor's intentions, motives, knowledge, behaviors, and to the outcomes they engender. Observers might respond negatively to the actor, for example, because they dislike her motives or the values her behavior discloses, or because they feel she should have anticipated the deleterious consequences of her actions. Extraevidential features include reactions to the participants based on factors such as their reputations, social attractiveness, race, or gender (Alicke et al., 1990).

The assumption that observers spontaneously evaluate the mental, behavioral, and consequence elements of harmful events is consistent with Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum's (1957) finding that evaluation is the most fundamental component of human judgment. More direct evidence for evaluation spontaneity comes

from research showing that evaluations occur automatically on encountering objects and experiencing events (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Fazio, 1989; Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986). Finally, the assumption that evaluative judgments occur spontaneously is central to most cognitively oriented social categorization and stereotyping theories (see, e.g., Bodenhausen, 1993; Brewer, 1988; Devine, 1989; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992; for a review, see Hamilton & Sherman, 1994).

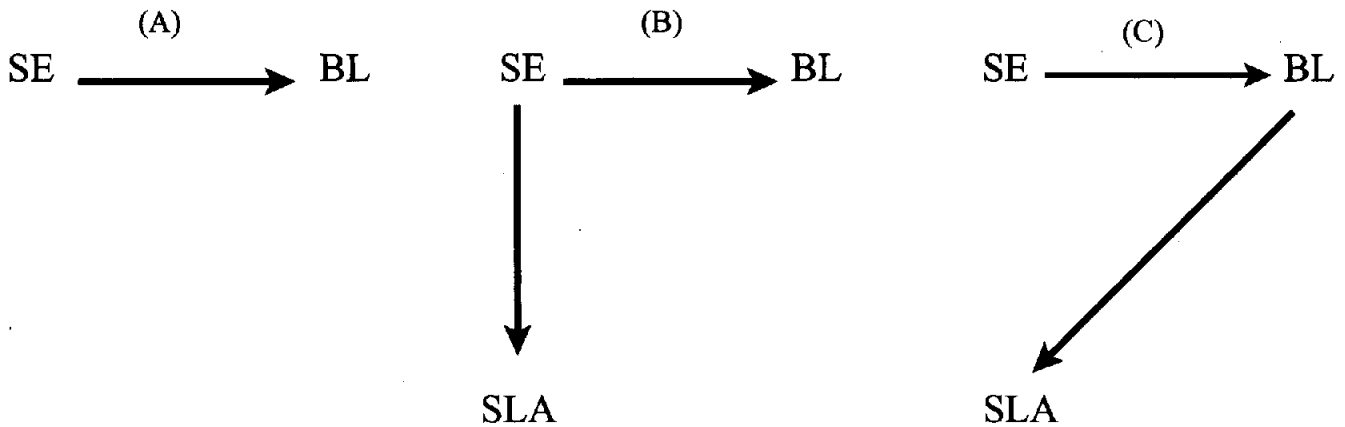
Spontaneous reactions to evidential and extraevidential event features activate the desire to blame the person or persons who evoke the most negative affect. The desire to identify a culpable agent derives in part from primitive retribution motives (Kelsen, 1943). The progression of Western societies has seen retribution dislodged from its natural law status (as represented by the Old Testament's "eye for an eye") and placed under the auspices of legal institutions. As Hogan and Emler (1981) suggested, bureaucratizing retribution frustrates the need for revenge. Because people can no longer retaliate against harmdoers with impunity, they must be satisfied with blaming and imposing sanctions. Calling attention to a human agent's misdeeds stains (Alicke, 1992; Feinberg, 1970) the harmdoer's character and impels observers to monitor and discourage future harmdoing.

Direct Spontaneous Evaluation Effects

Direct spontaneous evaluation effects occur when attitudinal or emotional reactions influence blame independently of structural linkage information. This type of direct spontaneous evaluation effect is shown in Panel A of Figure 3. A juror, for example, might recommend harsher penalties for a car thief than for a savings and loan convict based solely on her reactions to the crime. Similarly, racially biased observers may blame Black perpetrators more severely than White ones predominantly on the basis of their racial classification. Although experimental demonstrations of direct spontaneous evaluation effects are sparse, anecdotal examples abound. In the O. J. Simpson trial, Johnnie Cochran's summation for the defense emphasized the mistreatment of African Americans by racist police, leaving at least one Black juror in tears (Lacayo, 1995). Cochran's summation was followed by Marcia Clark's, which ended with the sounds of Nicole Brown Simpson's 911 calls to the police while pictures of her and Ron Goldman's dead bodies were flashed on a screen. The jury's quick verdict and disinclination to review the evidence raises the possibility that their judgment was influenced largely by their affective responses and that Cochran's summation was more emotionally effective.

A second type of direct spontaneous evaluation effect (Panel B of Figure 3) involves simultaneous spontaneous evaluation influences on blame and structural linkage assessments, with no mediating influence of structural linkage judgments on blame. Perhaps the most common instance of this possibility is when blame attributions are based predominately on the observer's emotions or values with weak structural linkage evidence. An observer who blames a driver for killing a child in a car accident, for example, might slightly exaggerate the driver's causal role in the incident (causal control assessment) and convince herself that the driver could possibly have foreseen the consequences (volitional outcome control), even while recognizing that the driver's degree of control was too weak by itself to warrant blame. Here, the observ-

DIRECT SPONTANEOUS EVALUATION EFFECTS



INDIRECT SPONTANEOUS EVALUATION EFFECT

DIRECT AND INDIRECT SPONTANEOUS EVALUATION EFFECTS

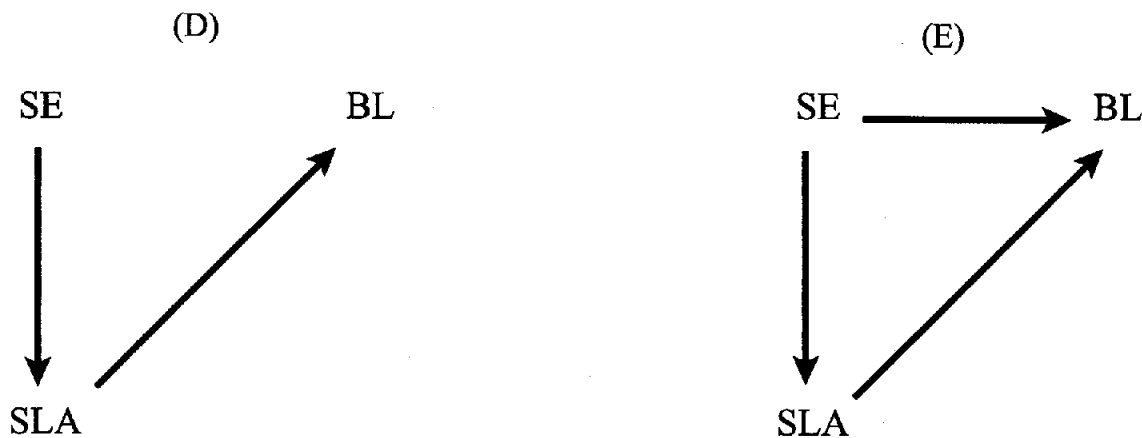


Figure 3. Direct and indirect spontaneous evaluation effects. BL = blame; SE = spontaneous evaluation; SLA = structural linkage assessment.

er's blame judgment is based predominantly on her negative reactions to the victim's death.

An interesting type of direct spontaneous evaluation effect occurs (as shown in Panel C of Figure 3) when observers alter their control perceptions to justify their blame ascriptions. In one experimental example (Alicke et al., 1994, Study 2), participants learned that a homeowner shot a presumed intruder in an upstairs bedroom. In the favorable outcome version, the victim was described as a violent criminal who had burglarized other homes in the neighborhood; in the unfavorable version, the victim was the boyfriend of the homeowner's daughter who was collecting some clothes for a beach trip. Participants rated the causal relevance of factors such as that the homeowner had two beers before he shot

the intruder and that he was in a bad mood. Such factors were perceived to have played a greater causal role in the shooting when the victim was the daughter's boyfriend than when he was a dangerous criminal. However, participants' causal ratings had no mediating effect on blame ascriptions. In terms of culpable control, these results suggest that spontaneous evaluations of the outcome directly affected blame ascriptions; which participants then buttressed by altering their causal control assessments.

Indirect Spontaneous Evaluation Effects

Indirect or mediated spontaneous evaluation effects occur when emotional or attitudinal reactions influence structural linkage as-

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assessments, thereby augmenting or diminishing blame. Observers who spontaneously evaluate the actor's behavior unfavorably, for example, will exaggerate evidence that establishes her causal or volitional control and de-emphasize exculpatory evidence. Conversely, observers who evaluate the actor's behavior favorably will exaggerate exculpatory evidence and de-emphasize incriminating evidence. Panel D of Figure 3 illustrates such mediated spontaneous evaluation effects, whereas Panel E illustrates the circumstance in which spontaneous evaluations exert both mediated and direct effects on blame attributions.

Negative spontaneous evaluations of evidential or extraevidential event features influence structural linkage assessments in three primary ways, including altering evidential standards for how much volitional or causal control is required to ascribe blame, influencing perceptions of the meaning or importance of the control evidence, and leading observers to seek information that supports a desired blame attribution. Each of these spontaneous evaluation effects is discussed separately below.

Altering Evidential Standards

One way in which spontaneous evaluations influence structural linkage assessments is by altering the correspondence between levels of perceived control and blame. Racially prejudiced observers, for example, who respond more negatively to a minority group member's harmful actions, require less evidence of intention, negligence, foresight, or causal influence than unbiased observers (Kerr, 1978). Reactions to extraneous, extraevidential features of behavior can also alter these standards. Consider an example in which a racially prejudiced observer learns that a Black man involved in a driving accident was romantically involved with his passenger, a White woman. An observer's unfavorable evaluation of interracial relationships may lead her to fault the driver for the accident based on tenuous evidence.

The potential impact of spontaneous evaluations on evidential standards is well known to criminal prosecutors who seek to emphasize the most salient and gruesome features of an offense (Bailey & Rothblatt, 1985). For example, criminal prosecutors routinely attempt to introduce graphic crime scene videotapes to jurors (Kassin & Garfield, 1991). The fact that such materials are admissible only if their informational value outweighs their potential inflammatory effect may reflect the judicial system's intuition that emotional reactions affect jurors' evidential standards.

Numerous psycholegal studies also suggest that observers' reactions to events induce different blame standards. One example is a study by Kassin and Garfield (1991) in which participants read a transcript of a murder trial and then watched a videotape of the actual crime scene immediately after the murder was committed, a crime scene from a different murder, or no videotape. Results showed that participants who were shown the relevant video set lower conviction standards than those in the other two conditions. These results suggest that unfavorable responses evoked by the relevant, graphic crime scene video led participants to alter their conviction standards.

In addition to social category information, evidential standards may be altered by unfavorable reactions to the behaviors or traits of specific actors. For example, although a victim's loathsome character is irrelevant for determining legal responsibility (*Federal Rules of Evidence*, 1987, Rule 404b), there is little doubt that a

jury's sympathies and antipathies for the victim influence their verdicts (Gerbas, Zuckerman, & Reis, 1977; Kalven & Zeisel, 1966; Wissler & Saks, 1985). Similarly, research on everyday blame attributions has shown that observers ascribe less blame to an actor who injures a dislikable than a likable victim (Alicke & Davis, 1989; Alicke et al., 1994; Landy & Aronson, 1969). According to the culpable control model, this effect occurs because observers spontaneously evaluate the perpetrator's intentions and behaviors less negatively when the victim is dislikable.

One of the most trenchant examples of altering evidential standards is the tendency to blame victims for their misfortunes (Lerner, 1980). In many instances, extremely low levels of control evidence suffice for blame. Lerner and his colleagues (e.g., Lerner, 1965; Lerner & Matthews, 1967; Simmons & Lerner, 1968) have conducted the most well-known line of victim-blame research. In a representative study, Lerner and Simmons (1966) showed that research participants tended to derogate a fellow student whom they saw receiving electric shocks, especially in martyr conditions in which the student accepted shocks to help others.

According to Lerner (1980), victim blame derives from the desire to perceive the world as a just place in which people are rewarded and punished in proportion to their deeds. The justice motive, in turn, develops from personal observations, cultural and religious teachings, and the striving for psychological balance (Heider, 1958). Victim blame serves, at least symbolically, to restore a sense of justice, whereas ascribing harm to impersonal environmental forces sustains the belief that bad things can happen randomly to blameless people (Wortman, 1976).

The culpable control model complements this interpretation by assuming that the need to preserve or restore justice results in unfavorable spontaneous reactions to a victim's suffering. These reactions lower the evidential threshold required to ascribe personal control and blame. Furthermore, observers in most victim-blame studies may assume that victims exerted process control over their misfortunes. People who receive electric shocks in experiments, for example, may be perceived to have exercised control by agreeing to participate in such experiments. Most real-world accident victims possess at least some process control over the circumstances that caused their injuries. Observers who wish to alleviate their uncomfortable feelings by blaming the victim can, therefore, capitalize on relatively weak process control evidence. If spontaneous negative evaluations lower evidential standards sufficiently, even low levels of process control can suffice to justify blame.

Altering Perceptions of the Evidence

A second way in which spontaneous evaluations influence structural linkage assessments is by altering volitional and causal control perceptions. In other words, in addition to altering the correspondence between degrees of control and levels of blame, spontaneous evaluations may change the way observers perceive control. In particular, observers who spontaneously evaluate the actor's behavior unfavorably may exaggerate evidence that establishes her causal or volitional control and de-emphasize exculpatory evidence. For example, an observer may overestimate the extent to which a couple's harsh child-rearing practices contributed to their child's emotional difficulties. As another possibility, observers who disapprove of the actor's goals may exaggerate his

foresight of achieving those goals. Some examples include inferring that a racist intended an offhand comment as an insult and that a sexist employer's actions were intentionally aimed at upsetting female employees.

The assumption that spontaneous evaluations can alter the way observers interpret control-related evidence potentially helps to account for many blame-related attributional phenomena. Three examples of how spontaneous evaluation effects complement previous theoretical interpretations of blame are provided below.

Example 1. The defensive attribution hypothesis (Burger, 1981; Shaver, 1970; Walster, 1966) provided the initial impetus for social-psychological investigations of blame and responsibility. The most prominent findings of this research are that accident perpetrators are blamed more when their actions produce severe versus mild consequences (Burger, 1981). The culpable control explanation of defensive attribution effects hinges on the assumption that unfavorable spontaneous evaluations of harmful consequences affect perceptions of negligence. In Walster's (1966) original outcome severity research, for example, an accident perpetrator was blamed more when his car rolled down a hill and injured two people than when the car hit a tree stump. According to the defensive attribution hypothesis (Shaver, 1970), blame attributions were determined by participants' beliefs that they could experience the same misfortune as the perpetrator. However, participants who read this story also learned that the perpetrator may have failed to engage the handbrake properly. According to the culpable control interpretation, unfavorable spontaneous evaluations of the harmful consequences led observers to perceive the actor as more negligent for failing to operate the handbrake properly, which in turn led them to blame him more for the accident.

Example 2. A second example suggests spontaneous evaluation effects on causal control perceptions. Participants in this study (Alicke, 1992, Study 1) read about a driver who was involved in an accident while speeding. Participants learned that the driver was speeding to hide either an anniversary present or a vial of cocaine from his parents and that he confronted a series of environmental obstacles along the way (e.g., slippery road, obscured stop sign). Participants indicated whether they thought the driver's speeding or the environmental obstacles was a more significant cause of the accident. Results showed that more causal attributions to the actor vis-à-vis the environment were made when the actor's motive was to hide cocaine versus an anniversary present. In culpable control terms, unfavorable spontaneous evaluations of the actor's motives led participants to exaggerate his causal control over the accident.

Example 3. A study by Alicke et al. (1994, Study 3) suggests that decisions that produce unfavorable outcomes and that presumably engender negative spontaneous evaluations lead observers to evaluate evidence in a way that justifies blaming the decision maker for the outcome. In one scenario, participants read about a psychiatrist who had to decide whether a patient should be released from a psychiatric hospital. Positive and negative outcome conditions were created for each alternative. Thus, participants read either that the psychiatrist decided to release or not to release the patient, and they further learned either that this decision led to very positive or very negative consequences. After learning of the outcome, participants were provided with a series of facts about the event and asked to indicate whether the facts supported, or failed to support, the psychiatrist's choice. For example, partici-

pants who learned that the psychiatrist decided to release the patient were provided with facts such as:

The patient had previously been placed in the hospital by a court order after he was convicted of assaulting a man in a bar.

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which this item provided a sound basis for the psychiatrist to release the patient or to keep him in the hospital. Participants who learned that the psychiatrist's decision led to negative outcomes (e.g., the patient assaulted a woman soon after being released) not only blamed him more but also indicated that the evidence provided better support for the alternative the psychiatrist did not choose than for the one he chose. In other words, participants were less likely to indicate that the facts supported the psychiatrist's decision when his decision produced negative rather than positive outcomes. This study shows that negative reactions to harmful outcomes lead observers to skew the evidence in a way that is consistent with blaming the decision maker for the consequences.

Biased Information Search

When further evidence about the harmful event is available, observers may engage in a biased information search to support a desired blame attribution. In a recent study designed to test this assumption (Mazzocco & Alicke, 1999), participants read an ambiguous story in which a subway passenger was approached by four teenagers who asked him for money. The passenger felt threatened and fired two shots, killing one of the teenagers. After reading the story, some participants learned that the teenagers were gang members with a history of robbery and assault whereas others learned that they were star athletes collecting money for their football team. Blameworthiness ratings showed the usual outcome bias effect (Alicke & Davis, 1989; Baron & Hershey, 1988) such that the shooter was blamed more when the victims were described as star athletes as opposed to gang members. Participants were also told that there were four eyewitnesses to the shooting, two who were pro-prosecution and two who were pro-defense, and that because of time limitations they could choose to read the testimony of three of the witnesses. Of participants who learned that the victims were star athletes and who presumably had more negative evaluations of the perpetrator, 75% preferred to read more of the pro-prosecution testimony. Of those who learned that the victims were gang members, 40% chose to read more of the pro-prosecution testimony ($p < .05$). These results suggest that participants who reacted more negatively to the actor for killing innocent victims favored information that supported a blame attribution.

Conditions That Foster Spontaneous Evaluation Effects

Spontaneous evaluation influences are facilitated by the subjectivity inherent in most social offenses. In contrast to criminal and civil offenses, which are governed by legal codes and case law, there is widespread disagreement about the nature and severity of social offenses. Observers' personal attitudes and values, therefore, have considerable latitude to influence their interpretations. For example, an observer might evaluate a car thief more negatively than a savings and loan convict based on her attitudes about each crime.

Many personal control assessments are also subjectively based, leaving ample room for spontaneous evaluation influences. Even legal standards for assessing control are deceptively subjective. Legal decision makers are enjoined to evaluate excuses that claim personal control was diminished by applying the reasonably prudent person criterion, that is, by estimating how the average person in the community would have behaved under similar circumstances. However, legal decision makers rarely possess actuarial data for making such projections and as a result are likely to rely on their subjective values and opinions. This assumption is supported by research on the false consensus effect (Marks & Miller, 1987; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977), which reveals a pervasive tendency for people to use their subjective preferences and beliefs to evaluate behavioral commonality.

In addition to judgmental subjectivity, spontaneous evaluation influences are facilitated by weak or ambiguous structural linkage evidence. Observers who dislike the perpetrator, for example, can readily skew ambiguous structural linkage evidence. Spontaneous evaluation effects are minimized, on the other hand, when structural linkage evidence is unambiguous. For example, clear evidence that harmful consequences were unintended, that the actor had low causal control over those consequences, or that mitigating circumstances prevailed should diminish spontaneous evaluation effects, especially when emotional reactions are negligible. Most observers, for example, would probably concur that Alzheimer's disease constrains the thought processes of afflicted individuals and that an epileptic's diminished control during a seizure warrants exculpation even if they disliked the consequences these incapacities produced.

Because spontaneous evaluations are conceived to be relatively automatic rather than inevitable, they can potentially be negated with conscious effort. Observers may, therefore, try to counteract spontaneous evaluation influences when they are aware of their biasing potential. Racists, for example, may try to inhibit their spontaneous negative reactions to minority group behaviors (Devine, 1989). One pitfall in the correction process, however, is that while observers monitor one source of bias, the integrative processes involved in assessing structural linkage evidence produce new inferences and associations (Schul & Bernstein, 1985). Observers who learn about harmful events, for example, are likely to draw dispositional inferences about the actor or victim (Uleman, 1989). In the process of assessing evidence, observers may conclude the perpetrator is dangerous, malevolent, or simply dislikable, or that the victim deserves the harmful consequences. These dispositional inferences can engender new spontaneous evaluations that amplify blame. Even if observers succeed in extracting one spontaneous evaluation influence from their blame assessments, the tendency to make dispositional inferences may introduce a new source of bias.

Blame Validation

The foregoing discussion suggests that spontaneous evaluations bias structural linkage assessments by altering evidential standards, influencing control perceptions, or leading observers to search selectively for information that supports a desired blame attribution. These effects can be conceptualized as aspects of blame-validation processing. Blame-validation processing refers to observers' proclivity to favor blame versus nonblame explana-

tions for harmful events and to de-emphasize mitigating circumstances. Spontaneous evaluations represent the motivational aspect of blame-validation processing. Blame-validation processing can also be engaged, however, by nonmotivational factors. Although spontaneous evaluations heighten the tendency to interpret structural linkage information in a way that exacerbates blame, they are not necessary for invoking such processes. Other factors that contribute to blame-validation processing include the tendency to assume human agency control over events and to hold normative expectations about events and the people involved. Each of these contributors to blame validation is discussed separately, followed by a summary of blame-validation processing.

Human Agency Control

Blame validation processing is encouraged by the tendency to view people rather than the environment as the prepotent controlling forces behind harmful events. As the voluminous correspondence bias literature (e.g., Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Jones, 1979, 1990) demonstrates, observers are strongly inclined to ascribe events to personal dispositions and to de-emphasize environmental contributions. The correspondence bias literature suggests that structural linkage evidence favoring human agency explanations will be supported tenaciously in the face of contradictory information. On the other hand, even weak evidence of human agency may overwhelm initial environmental hypotheses. Simply put, human agency attributions are favored over explanations involving mitigating circumstances, are less modifiable once they are formulated, and readily supercede environmental hypotheses that mitigate blame.

One rationale for assuming the preeminence of human agency explanations is that it is easier to imagine rectifying human actions than environmental events (cf. Hart & Honore, 1959). Although it is plausible, for example, to correct a person's reckless driving, it is implausible to alter a rainstorm. In this regard, Kelley (1972) has stated that "controllable factors will have high salience as candidates for causal explanation. In cases of ambiguity or doubt, the causal analysis will be biased in its outcome toward controllable factors" (p. 23). In other words, controllable behaviors are favored in structural linkage assessments, and human agency acts are typically more controllable than environmental events. This conjecture is supported by counterfactual reasoning theorists' assumption that it is easier to construct alternatives to human actions than to environmental events (Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Roese, 1997).

Furthermore, human agency is frequently the abnormal condition that distinguishes the harmful event from similar, harmless ones. Abnormal conditions causes were first identified in Hart and Honore's (1959) classic analysis of causation in the law. Hart and Honore noted that people generally seek particularistic rather than universal explanations to account for harmful events (see also Hilton & Slugoski, 1986). Whereas classic causal theories, such as Hume's (1739/1978) regularity theory or Mill's (1843/1967) canons of logic, focus on conditions that establish universal connections between antecedent and consequent events (for a review relevant to psychology, see White, 1990), Hart and Honore recognized that causation in the law and in everyday social life focuses on events that contribute uniquely to harmful consequences. A person injured in a driving accident, for example, would be more interested in factors that explain this particular

accident, such as a drunk driver, than in universal laws governing car accidents. As Hart and Honore suggested, human agency is frequently the abnormal feature that differentiates present from usual circumstances. In choosing between a drunk driver and weather conditions as causal candidates for the car accident, therefore, the culpable control model assumes that observers will favor the human act.

The tendency to assume human agency control can be countermanded by reality constraints. On learning of a plane crash, for example, observers are unlikely to hypothesize that the pilot crashed the plane purposely. However, even tenuous implications of human involvement can shift the focus to human agency explanations. One example involves the crash of TWA Flight 800 over Long Island, New York, in the summer of 1996, which was soon followed by unfounded rumors about military conspiracies. More recently, the shooting deaths of 12 students in a Littleton, Colorado, high school was followed by media accounts that blamed local law enforcement, school officials, the parents of the shooters, the dealers who sold the guns, and even student athletes. Virtually none of the media reports mentioned that the recent increase in multiple school shootings from about two to five per year is statistically meaningless (Stolberg, 1999).

Normative Expectations

The propensity to blame human agents and to downplay mitigating circumstances can be facilitated by normative expectations. One source of normative expectations is observers' general knowledge of events, or event schemas (Hastie, 1980). Consider a car accident schema. Observers who learn that a speeding driver was involved in a car accident are likely to focus on the driver because speeding is highly diagnostic of causing car accidents. Subsequent mitigating information about poor weather conditions will be de-emphasized unless it is sufficiently compelling to overwhelm the human agency hypothesis.

Event schemas also entail observers' intuitive understanding of social motivation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In culpable control terms, social motivation knowledge translates into volitional control expectations. For example, observers who know that Person A is jealous of Person B will tend to assume that Person A intentionally provoked Person B when they learn that Person A and Person B have had a fight. In this instance, expectations about the possible consequences of jealous motives, in the absence of other information, guide structural linkage analyses.

A second source of normative expectations involves social category norms. Social category information includes demographic factors such as race, gender, social status, or occupation, as well as personality traits and characteristics. Although cultural prescriptions discourage using social category information to assess blame, research has shown that blame and responsibility attributions are influenced by factors such as a victim's or perpetrator's personality (Alicke & Davis, 1989), social attractiveness (Kaplan & Kemmerick, 1974; Landy & Aronson, 1969), or status (Shaw & Skolnick, 1996).

The tendency to assimilate behavior to expectations suggests that people who behave in personality-consistent ways will have difficulty seeking mitigation. The ambiguous behavior of a person with a history of selfishness, for example, is more likely to be seen as selfish than the same behavior by a reputedly generous person.

People who are implicated in harmful events are likely to be seen as having acted intentionally or with foresight when their behavior or its consequences are consistent with their personalities (Alicke & Yurak, 1995).

Summary of Blame-Validation Processing

Figure 4 summarizes the blame-validation process. The culpable control model assumes that both motivational and nonmotivational factors contribute to the tendency to interpret structural linkage information in a blame-validation mode. Motivational factors comprise spontaneous evaluations of the event and the participants involved, whereas nonmotivational factors include the tendencies to favor human agency explanations for events and normative expectations.

Although nonmotivational factors are assumed to be sufficient to instigate blame-validation processing, spontaneous evaluations strengthen these processes. Furthermore, spontaneous evaluations can instigate blame-validation processing when nonmotivational factors are relatively weak. Once a blame-validation mode is evoked, its effects on structural linkage assessments depend on the state of the structural linkage evidence and the strength of the blame-validation mode.

Comparisons and Conclusions

Harmful events, from minor transgressions to international disasters, arouse the desire to identify a blameworthy culprit. Blaming and punishing harmdoers serves to discourage people who imperil others' physical and psychological well-being. It is difficult, therefore, to imagine a culture in which harmdoers were not blamed and forewarned of the potential for punitive sanctions.

Extant theories of blame and responsibility reflect two basic orientations, one emphasizing the motivational underpinnings of blame and the second positing a series of decision stages through which blame attributions proceed. Decision-stage theories are modeled on the tenets of the Anglo American legal system. Accordingly, the blame criteria included in decision-stage theories are derived from the legal requirements for criminal responsibility, namely, *mens rea* (a guilty mind) and *actus reus* (a willful or negligent act that plays a causal role in producing harmful consequences). Decision-stage theories prescribe how blame and responsibility should be ascribed when the ultimate goal is to promote justice. However, ordinary observers do not always have justice as their goal and are not always able to attain it when they do (Lerner, Goldberg, & Tetlock, 1998).

The culpable control model's structural linkages (mind to behavior, behavior to consequence, and mind to consequence) overlap with the criteria specified in decision-stage models. However, the culpable control model differs from decision-stage theories in deriving these components from the general analysis of personal control. The personal control perspective entails a number of differences in the way blame criteria are treated. One difference is the assumption that the elements of control vary quantitatively rather than qualitatively. Rather than depicting actions and outcomes as either intentional or unintentional, caused or uncaused, foreseen or unforeseen, and excusable or inexcusable, the culpable control model allows for gradations of perceived control. For example, observers ascribe more volitional control to a person who

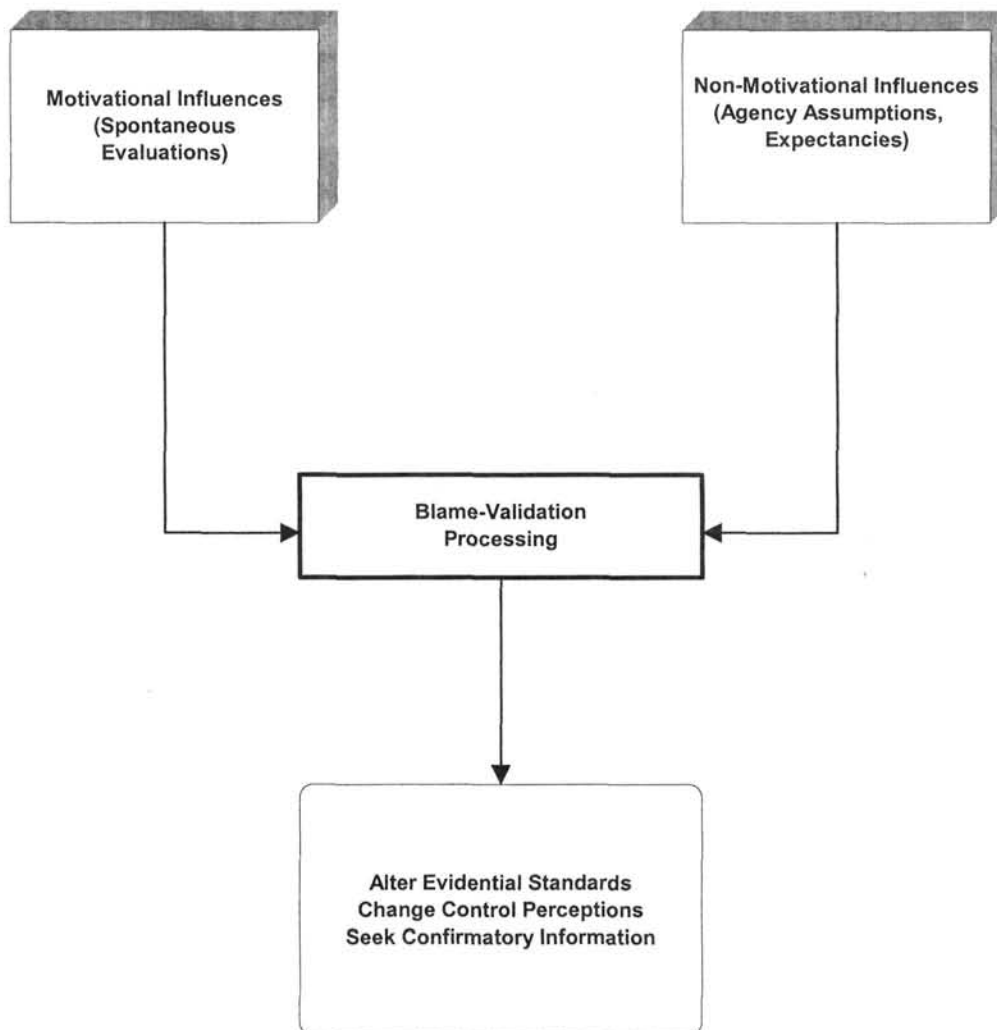


Figure 4. The blame-validation process.

enacts an elaborate scheme than to one who behaves impulsively (Roberts & Golding, 1991). Mitigation due to excuses and justifications is also likely to vary by degree. In the same situation in which a headache provides a weak excuse for temperamental behavior, a brain tumor may mitigate blame completely.

In addition to positing gradations of perceived control, the culpable control model allows for different degrees of blame. Whereas legal decision makers must render all-or-none verdicts in criminal or civil responsibility cases, ordinary observers can ascribe any degree of blame they wish. The amount of blame observers attribute depends on the strength of the blame-validation processing mode evoked and on the state of the structural linkage evidence.

Whereas the culpable control model's analysis of personal control overlaps somewhat with the main tenets of decision-stage theories, the assumption that personal control estimations and blame attributions are affected by spontaneous reactions is a more novel facet of the culpable control model. The attitudinal component of spontaneous evaluations highlights the fact that control and blame estimations are performed based on observers' subjective

beliefs and values. The emotional component of spontaneous evaluations makes emotional reactions central to the model. In most theories, emotional reactions are peripheral factors that divert observers from adhering to prescribed blame criteria. Weiner's (1995) theory, although it deals primarily with responsibility rather than blame, is a notable exception. However, Weiner's theory emphasizes the emotional consequences rather than the antecedents of responsibility ascriptions. In his model, judgments of responsibility lead to feelings of anger, which encourage punitive behavior. Conversely, uncontrollable or mitigating circumstances lead to sympathy and presumably benevolent behavior.

The culpable control model differs from Weiner's (1995) theory in emphasizing the emotional antecedents of blame attributions. However, although Weiner's model does not specifically address emotional antecedents of blame, his analysis clearly allows for the possibility of such effects. Weiner noted, for example, that blameworthiness judgments are likely to be swayed by emotionally arousing factors such as outcome severity. More importantly, he argues that in emotionally arousing circumstances people may first ascribe responsibility and then consider control and mitigating

circumstances. This conjecture is explicitly contained in the culpable control model's assumption that observers tend to assume human agency blame while adjusting insufficiently for mitigating information.

In contrast to decision-stage theories that model blame and responsibility attributions on Anglo American jurisprudence, Schlenker et al.'s (1994) recent triangle model derives responsibility criteria from personal identity concerns. The triangle model entails three fundamental responsibility criteria, namely, whether the actor's behavior contravenes prevailing cultural prescriptions (link between prescriptions and event), whether the actor is expected to adhere to these prescriptions (link between prescriptions and identity), and whether the actor controlled the event in the sense of having freely and intentionally effected the consequences (link between identity and event). The emphasis on identity highlights the fact that blame and responsibility ascriptions depend on the actor's self-presentational claims. People with lofty moral pretensions, for example, may be held to more stringent standards than those with modest moral aspirations. Rather than prescribing how blame or responsibility attributions should be made, the triangle model describes the aspects of personal identity that underlie responsibility ascriptions.

Whereas the triangle model is derived from personal identity concerns, the culpable control model is based on the mental, behavioral, and consequence elements that compose personal control and on psychological processes that influence control and blame assessments. In the culpable control model, the link between prescriptions and events is governed by cultural norms and subjective value assessments that primarily influence spontaneous reactions to the actor's intentions, behaviors, or the consequences they produce. The identity-prescription link is not directly represented in the culpable control model but can be incorporated by means of the assumption that control assessments and spontaneous evaluations depend on specific aspects of the actor's identity. A person who claims to be extremely moral, for example, may be viewed more negatively for the same moral failing than a person with lower ethical aspirations. Finally, the identity-event link reflects personal control assessments. The culpable control and triangle models are, therefore, complementary but focus on different facets of blame assessment.

In sum: The culpable control model provides an integrative scheme for conceptualizing the literature on blame and responsibility as it relates to everyday blame ascription. This perspective helps identify the various ways in which blame is attributed and mitigated as well as the factors involved in blame and mitigation decisions. Personal control provides an overarching scheme within which to view these diverse constraining conditions. The assumptions that people engage in blame-validation processing that tends to favor human agency explanations while de-emphasizing mitigating circumstance evidence links the study of blame with current theories of social cognition and judgment.

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Call for Papers: *Emotion*

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Emotion, a new journal scheduled to be published by the American Psychological Association in spring 2001, seeks to publish significant contributions to the study of emotion from a wide range of theoretical traditions and research domains. *Emotion* will include articles that advance knowledge and theory about all aspects of emotional processes, including reports of substantial empirical studies, scholarly reviews, and major theoretical articles.

Submissions from all domains of emotion research are encouraged, including studies focusing on cultural, social, temperament and personality, cognitive, developmental, health or biological variables that affect or are affected by emotional functioning. Both laboratory and field studies are appropriate for the journal, as are neuroimaging studies of emotional processes. Studies of psychopathology contributing to the understanding of the role of emotional processes in affective and behavioral disorders are also welcome. Reports of work at the animal and molecular levels will be considered if they help to elucidate fundamental mechanisms of emotion.

Authors should prepare manuscripts according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (4th ed.). All manuscripts must include an abstract containing a maximum of 960 characters and spaces (approximately 120 words). Manuscripts for *Emotion* can vary in length; typically they will range from 15 to 40 double-spaced manuscript pages. Manuscripts should be of sufficient length to ensure theoretical and methodological competence. Most of the articles to be published in *Emotion* will be reports of original research, but other types of articles are acceptable. Case studies from either a clinical setting or a laboratory will be considered if they raise or illustrate important questions that go beyond the single case and have heuristic value. Manuscripts that present or discuss theoretical formulations of emotion and related affective phenomena, or that evaluate competing theoretical perspectives on the basis of published data, may also be accepted. Comprehensive reviews of the empirical literature in an area of study are acceptable if they contain a meta-analysis and/or present novel theoretical or methodological perspectives. Comments on articles published in the journal will be considered.

Submit manuscripts (two copies), along with a disk copy (including text and tables, and figures if possible), postal and e-mail addresses, and phone and fax numbers, to Co-Editor

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