

Making Attributions for Behaviors: The Prevalence of Correspondence Bias in the General Population

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Empirical evidence for the claim that people from Western cultures are prone to correspondence bias is based exclusively on college student samples. Using the attitude attribution paradigm, the current study explored (a) the prevalence of correspondence bias in a national representative sample of American adults, (b) the degree that correspondence bias generalized across demographic characteristics, and (c) whether self-construal or lay philosophies of behavior accounted for correspondence bias. Although results generalized across demographic characteristics, correspondence bias was far from universal; 53% of participants exhibited correspondence bias. Correspondence bias was positively associated with a dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior but unrelated to self-construals.

A now vast corpus of research has demonstrated that people tend to attribute the causes of behavior to stable dispositions rather than to aspects of situations. This phenomenon has been variously referred to as correspondence bias, dispositional bias, lay dispositionism, and the fundamental attribution error (e.g., Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Heider, 1958; Jones & Harris, 1967; Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Although widely replicated, we still have a limited empirical understanding of the true prevalence of correspondence bias, because most, if not all, research on correspondence bias has used convenience samples. The exclusive use of convenience samples not only limits understanding of the prevalence of the effect but also limits testing within-culture variability in theorized causes of correspondence bias. The goals of the research described in this article were to address these two important gaps in knowledge. Specifically, the present research examined (a) the pervasiveness of correspondence bias in the mass public, and (b) the extent that correspondence

bias can be explained by individual differences in self-construal or lay philosophies of behavior.

TESTING THE GENERALIZABILITY OF CORRESPONDENCE BIAS IN THE MASS PUBLIC

It is widely accepted that people in the United States and other Western cultures are prone to correspondence bias (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). For example, one study that used that the classic attitude-attribution paradigm (Jones & Harris, 1967) found that more than 86% of university student participants exhibited correspondence bias (Krull et al., 1999).¹ Despite the large amount of research that has been conducted, no research has examined the prevalence of correspondence bias using representative samples of people in the United States or other nations. Research with college student samples works well for determining whether a phenomenon occurs at all, but it cannot address how frequently a

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¹Krull et al.'s (1999) data included responses from students in the United States and Taiwan, but no significant difference in the amount of correspondence bias existed as a function of culture.

phenomenon occurs in the population as a whole. To make population estimates, one needs to collect a probability sample of the population one wishes to describe (Couper, 2000), that is, a sample in which every member of the population has an equal probability of being included. Therefore, to the extent that one might wish to make claims about tendencies of people in the United States, one would need to have data from a probability sample of people in the United States.

College students tend to differ from the general population in a number of important ways (Sears, 1986). Therefore, there are reasons to be skeptical about whether studies that use college student samples are very representative of how people in the mass public think or behave. For example, entrance requirements for college lead to selection biases that favor people who have strong cognitive skills and are more compliant to authority (Sears, 1986). As a result, college students may differ from people not enrolled in college because they may process information differently (e.g., faster, more thoroughly) than people who do not enroll in college, or because they may be more likely to respond in a way that seems consistent with the researchers' goals. In addition, college students are likely to be of higher socioeconomic status than their non-college-bound peers. Considerable research indicates that people in positions of status or power prefer to take personal credit for their success, and they are likely to underestimate features of their situation that contribute to their achievements (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Consistent with this idea, research with convenience samples of community members has found that people of greater wealth and social status are more likely make dispositional attributions than their less wealthy and privileged peers (Beauvois & Dubois, 1988; Kluegel & Bobo, 1993). In sum, it is still unclear how common correspondence bias is in the mass public. Correspondence bias may appear to be more common than it actually is, because most research reported in the literature relied on samples that may have been higher in cognitive ability, had stronger desires to appease authority, or felt a greater need to justify their relative privilege.

Consistent with the notion that overreliance on college student samples might lead to biased conclusions, a review that included observations from hundreds of thousands of college student and adult nonstudent participants and tested 65 relationships between behavioral and psychological variables indicated that in nearly 20% of the relationships tested, the direction of the effect changed across sample types (Peterson, 2001). In addition, the effect sizes were significantly larger for student than nonstudent samples in more than two thirds of the studies examined. In short, there appears to be both theoretical and empirical cause for concern about the generalizability of results observed with student samples.

In summary, despite claims about the widespread tendency of people in Western cultural contexts to exhibit correspondence bias, we do not really know how widespread this tendency may be. In addition, little research has explicitly tested theoretical accounts for why people (and especially why those in Western cultural contexts, like the United States) make correspondent inferences.

EXPLANATIONS FOR CORRESPONDENCE BIAS

There are at least two major explanations for why people make correspondent inferences. Specifically, theorists have linked both self-construal and people's lay philosophy of behavior to attribution tendencies. These approaches are briefly reviewed next.

Self-Construal

The self-construal explanation for correspondence bias is based on the idea that people place very different emphasis on the extent to which they view themselves as individuals or as members of groups. Differences in self-construal are important because self-construals act as filters that affect not only how people understand themselves but also how they perceive others' behavior (Kitayama & Markus, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People with stronger independent self-construals organize their senses of self more by references to distinctiveness, autonomy, and independence than do people with weaker independent self-construals. Therefore, people high in independent self-construal should be more likely to view others' behavior as self-expressions that are indicative of underlying traits than people low in independent self-construal. In contrast, people with more interdependent self-construals have senses of self that are primarily understood in terms of relationships with others and the duties and obligations associated with those relationships. Therefore, people high in interdependent self-construal should be more likely to identify situational constraints on behavior than those low in interdependent self-construal because the former pay more attention to behavioral context than do the latter. Although self-construal theory has been mostly applied to understanding cultural differences in attribution tendencies, it also proposes that individual differences in internalization of an independent or interdependent self-construal can explain within-culture differences in attribution tendencies (e.g., Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Specifically, correspondence bias should be negatively related to interdependent self-construal and positively related to independent self-construal, regardless of cultural context.

Lay Philosophy of Behavior

The lay philosophy of behavior approach to explaining correspondence bias posits that people internalize folk theories of causality that in turn directly influence how they make attributions for behavior (Nisbett, 2003; Norenzayan, Choi, & Nisbett, 1999; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Attribution research has focused on the extent to which people endorse three different lay philosophies of behavior. A dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior contends that behavior is predominantly fixed and trait based. Therefore, people who strongly endorse a dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior should expect most people to behave consistently across situations. In contrast, a situationist lay philosophy of behavior states that behavior is dynamic and situation specific. Therefore, people who endorse a situationist lay philosophy of behavior should expect most people to behave alike if placed in similar situations. Alternatively, an interactionist lay philosophy of behavior asserts that personality and situational elements jointly determine behavior. Therefore, people who endorse an interactionist lay philosophy of behavior should have an integrated view of the determinants of behavior. Although research on lay philosophies of behavior has found that some cultural differences in lay philosophies of behavior correspond to cultural differences in attribution tendencies (Norenzayan, Choi, & Nisbett, 2002), no research has tested whether lay philosophies of behavior can account for within-culture differences in correspondence bias. However, one might predict that correspondence bias should be less evident in people who strongly endorse a situationist lay philosophy of behavior, and more evident in people who strongly endorse a dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior, regardless of cultural context (Nisbett, 2003; Norenzayan et al., 1999, 2002; see also Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997).

The current study (a) explored the prevalence of correspondence bias in the mass public, and (b) tested whether individual differences in strength of correspondent inferences could be explained by individual differences in self-construals, lay philosophy of behavior, or both. Hypotheses were tested using the attitude-attribution paradigm (Jones & Harris, 1967) and a nationally representative sample of adults living in the United States.

METHOD

Participants

The study sample was drawn from a nationally representative panel of adults maintained by Knowledge Networks (KN). Panel members are recruited using random-digit-dialing telephone selection methods, and

the characteristics of the panel closely match those of the U.S. Census (see <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/> for comparisons of the panel with current Census figures). Panel members receive Internet access in exchange for participation in occasional surveys. Five hundred KN panelists were solicited via e-mail, and 380 participants responded within the 2-week fielding period.

Procedure

Participants read a paragraph that introduced them to a student member of a school's debate team. The paragraph explained that the debate team coach asked the student to write an essay on affirmative action to practice for an upcoming debate. The coach determined the position that the student took in the essay (pro- or anti-affirmative action) with a coin toss. A detailed description of the coin toss procedure was included to ensure that participants understood that the position taken by the author was randomly assigned. Participants then read scanned copies of handwritten essays that ostensibly were written by the student. Participants in the anti-affirmative action essay condition read,

Affirmative action is a problem for society because it violates the basic commitment America has to provide equal opportunity to all. If some people get special opportunities because of their race or gender, the playing field is no longer level for everyone else. Affirmative action could also backfire and make people more racist or sexist because they will believe racial minorities and women are hired only because of their race and gender, and not because they were the best qualified for the job. Employment statistics show that racial minorities and women have made lots of progress in the last decade; they no longer need special laws to protect them.

Participants in the pro-affirmative action essay condition read,

Affirmative action is good for society because it supports the basic commitment America has to provide equal opportunity for all. Because some people have been denied opportunities because of their race or gender, the playing field has not be level for everyone, so laws are needed to make things fair. Affirmative action will also make people less racist or sexist because they will learn that racial minorities can do these jobs as well as anyone else and are in fact well-qualified for the job. Employment statistics show that racial minorities and women have a long way to go to have equal status, so they therefore need special laws to protect them.

We chose to study affirmative action attitudes because we expected the American public to be fairly balanced in terms of the prevalence of pro- and

anti-affirmative action attitudes. If perceivers also expected Americans to be evenly split on the issue, then population base rates should be less likely to impact whether or how much people make correspondent inferences based on the position espoused by the essay in the study. Therefore, we first explored people's perceptions of the population base rate of affirmative action attitudes using a separate sample of 379 KN panelists. Specifically, participants indicated how many people out of 100 were likely to have pro- [anti-]affirmative action attitudes using a scale that ranged from 0 to 100 and intervals of 10. Consistent with our expectations, a one sample *t* test revealed that participants' perceptions of base rates did not differ from the midpoint, or 50 of 100 people, $t(378) = -1.31, ns$. That is, people perceived the public to be divided equally on either side of affirmative action. Therefore, base rates are unlikely to have played a major role in the way people perceived essay authors in the focal study, regardless of the issue position taken in the essay.

Measures

Essay author's attitude. To assess participants' perceptions of the essay author's attitude about affirmative action, participants were asked, "Do you think the student's true attitude is more pro- or more anti-affirmative action?" Participants responded on a 7-point scale with the point labels *strongly pro-affirmative action, moderately pro-affirmative action, slightly pro-affirmative action, can't tell, slightly anti-affirmative action, moderately anti-affirmative action, and strongly anti-affirmative action*. Responses scored -3 to $+3$, with negative values reflecting anti-affirmative action responses, positive values reflecting pro-affirmative action responses, and 0 reflecting a *can't tell* response.

Essay-attitude consistency. Correspondence bias traditionally has been operationalized as the extent to which people's perceptions of the essay author's attitude differ from the midpoint of a bipolar scale. When testing explanations for correspondence bias, however, it is important to investigate whether and to what extent explanatory variables are associated with the amount of correspondence bias participants exhibit (i.e., degree that participants believe that the essay author's attitude was consistent with the position argued in the essay). We therefore constructed a measure of attitude consistency by collapsing across essay valence. This measure ranged from -3 (participant judged the student's attitude to be very inconsistent with essay) to $+3$ (participant judged student's attitude to be very inconsistent with essay), and had a midpoint of 0 that represented an unbiased or *can't tell* response.

Self-construal. Independent and interdependent self-construals were assessed using a shortened version of a measure developed by Singelis (1994). Although not ideal, an effort was made to keep respondent burden as low as possible to maximize response rates to the full survey. Independent self-construal was measured with the following items: "I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects," "I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I have just met," and "My personal identity, independent of others, is important to me" (Spearman-Brown stepped-up reliability coefficient = .59). Interdependent self-construal was measured with the items, "It is important to me to maintain harmony with my group," "My relationships with others are usually more important than my own accomplishments," and "I will stay in a group if they need me, even when I am not happy with the group" (Spearman-Brown stepped-up reliability coefficient = .54). Participants responded on 7-point scales with the point labels of *strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree or disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, and strongly agree*.

To address potential issues associated with somewhat low scale reliability of the items, we conducted a principal components analysis with a varimax rotation. Results revealed the expected two component solution. Items tapping independent self-construal loaded together on the first component (eigenvalue = 1.81, respective item loadings of .66, .70, and .68), and the items tapping interdependent self-construal loaded together on the second component (eigenvalue = 1.11, and respective item loadings of .55, .67, and .74). Component scores reflecting independent and interdependent self-construal were calculated using the regression method (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Lay philosophy of behavior. Participants indicated the degree that they agreed with statements that reflected dispositionist, situationist, or interactionist lay philosophies of behavior using slightly abbreviated descriptions used by Norenzayan et al. (2002). The dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior stated,

How people behave is mostly determined by their personality. One's behavior is remarkably stable across time and consistent across situations because it is guided by personality. Therefore, if we know the personality of a person, we can easily predict how the person will behave in the future and explain why that person behaved a particular way in the past.

The situationist lay philosophy of behavior stated,

How people behave is mostly determined by the situation in which they find themselves. Often, people in a

particular situation behave very similarly despite large individual differences in personality. Therefore, to predict and explain one's behavior, we have to focus on the situation rather than personality.

The interactionist lay philosophy of behavior stated,

How people behave is always jointly determined by their personality and the situation in which they find themselves. Therefore we cannot predict and explain how someone will behave by personality or situation alone. To predict behavior, one has to know something about both the situation and the person's personality.

Each lay philosophy of behavior was presented separately, and order of presentation was randomized across

TABLE 1
Demographic Profile of the Sample

<i>Sample Size</i>	<i>380 (%)</i>
Gender	
Male	49
Female	51
Age	
18–29	16
30–44	30
45–59	28
60–86	26
Highest level of education	
Less than high school	4
Some high school, no high school diploma	13
High school graduate or equivalent (GED)	35
Some college, no degree	18
Associate degree	7
Bachelor's degree	16
Master's degree	6
Professional degree (MD, DDS, LLB, JD)	1
Doctorate degree	.5
Household annual income	
Less than \$14,999	12
\$15,000–\$29,999	20
\$30,000–\$49,999	29
\$50,000–\$74,999	18
\$75,000–\$99,999	11
\$100,000–\$124,999	4
\$125,000 or more	5
Race/Ethnicity	
White	73
Black	11
Hispanic	8
Asian	2
Other	5
Region	
Northeast	17
Midwest	25
South	37
West	21

Note. Age and income were measured at more fine-grained levels than reported here, but ranges were compressed for ease of presentation.

participants. Participants responded on 7-point scales with the point labels of *strongly disagree*, *moderately disagree*, *slightly disagree*, *neither agree or disagree*, *slightly agree*, *moderately agree*, and *strongly agree*.

Demographic variables. When individuals join the KN panel, they report background information, including gender, geographic region of residence, age, level of education, and total household income (see Table 1). Level of education was measured on a 9-point scale, and total household income was measured on a 17-point scale. These are the same scales as those used in the General Social Survey.

RESULTS

The Results section is organized into three sections. The first section addresses whether we replicated the results typically observed with college student samples when we tested for correspondence bias using a national representative sample. The second section reports tests of whether there were any important demographic differences in the tendency to make correspondent inferences. The third section describes tests of predictions derived from the self-construal and lay philosophy of behavior explanations for why people make correspondent inferences. Results indicated that the American public on average exhibits correspondence bias (replicating research with college student samples), but substantial portions of the American public made unbiased inferences or noncorrespondent inferences about the essayists' attitude. Other results revealed limited support for the notion that lay philosophies of behavior would be related to correspondence bias but found no support for the prediction that there would be a connection between self-construals and correspondent bias.

How Robust Is Correspondence Bias?

One goal of the current study was to assess whether the correspondence bias effect observed with college student samples replicated with a national representative sample. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tested the effect of essay valence on perceptions of the essay author's attitude. Results indicated that perceptions of the essay author's attitude differed as a function of essay valence, $F(1, 378) = 93.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$. Participants who read a pro-affirmative action essay ($M = 1.11$, $SD = 1.36$) perceived the author to be more in favor of affirmative action than participants who read an anti-affirmative action essay ($M = -0.41$, $SD = 1.67$). Moreover, mean perceptions of the essay author's attitude significantly differed from zero in the expected directions for participants who read a pro-affirmative action

essay, $t(189) = 11.27$, $p < .001$, and an anti-affirmative action essay, $t(189) = -3.34$, $p = .001$. Therefore, the current study replicated results of other correspondence bias studies that used college student samples (e.g., Jones & Harris, 1967).

The analyses just reported represent the analytic techniques commonly used to document correspondence bias. Rather than focus exclusively on the sample mean, however, we conducted a descriptive analysis of how often and in what way the essay content affected participants' perceptions of the essay author's attitude. Specifically, we categorized participants' responses as a function of whether they (a) expected the essay author's attitude to be consistent with the essay content, (b) expected the essay author's attitude to be inconsistent with the essay content, or (c) indicated that they could not tell the essay author's attitude. For simplicity of presentation, we discuss the results of descriptive analyses conducted on the complete sample (i.e., collapsing across essay valence). Valence-specific results are reported in Table 2. A descriptive analysis is particularly meaningful in our study because our national representative sample data allowed us to make population estimates of correspondence bias. Analysis revealed that 53.1% of our sample exhibited correspondence bias, that is, they reported that the student's true attitude was consistent with the valence of the essay (i.e., participants who read a pro-affirmative action essay believed that the student was pro-affirmative action, or those who read an anti-affirmative action essay believed that the student was anti-affirmative action). In contrast, 27.1% of participants were unbiased and reported that they could not identify the student's true attitude based on the information provided. Surprisingly, our data also revealed that 19.8% of our sample made essay-attitude inconsistent inferences. That is, about one fifth of our participants believed that the student's true attitude differed in valence from the position conveyed in the essay, demonstrating the opposite of the correspondence bias.

In summary, mean comparisons replicated previous studies of correspondence bias. On average, participants' perceived the essay author's attitude to be consistent with the position argued in the essay. Descriptive analysis revealed that slightly more than half of our

sample made correspondent inferences, but a substantial minority made perfectly rational (i.e., *can't tell*) responses, and another substantial minority made noncorrespondent inferences, that is, they indicated that the essayist's attitude was the opposite of the position taken in the essay.

Demographic Characteristics and Correspondence Bias

In addition to testing whether and to what extent correspondence bias existed in a nationally representative sample, we were also interested in testing whether correspondence bias varied across demographic characteristics, including gender, geographic region of residence, age, income, and education, and whether individual differences in self-construal or lay philosophies of behavior could account for correspondence bias.

A one-way ANOVA found no effect of gender on essay-attitude consistency, $F(1, 378) = 0.15$, ns , $\eta_p^2 = .00$. Similarly, a one-way ANOVA found no effect of geographic region of residence on essay-attitude consistency, $F(1, 376) = 1.05$, ns , $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Correlational analysis revealed that essay-attitude consistency was unrelated to age, income, and level of education (see Table 3). Therefore, the likelihood of exhibiting correspondence bias appears to be stable across gender, geographic region, age, income, and level of education.

Lay Philosophies of Behavior, Self-Construals, and Correspondence Bias

We next tested whether lay philosophies of behavior and self-construals were related to essay-attitude consistency (see Table 3). Essay-attitude consistency correlated significantly with dispositionist but not situationist or interactionist lay philosophies of behavior. People who more strongly endorsed a dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior were also more likely to infer that the student's attitude on affirmative action was consistent with the content of the essay. Further analysis regressed essay-attitude consistency on dispositionist, situationist, interactionist lay philosophies of behavior, independent and interdependent self-construal, age, income, and level of education. The effect of dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior on essay-attitude consistency was significant, $\beta = .11$, $t(363) = 2.10$, $p = .036$, indicating that the effect of dispositionalist lay theories uniquely contributed to correspondent inference. None of the other effects were significant.

In summary, correspondence bias was stable across each of several demographic characteristics tested. Moreover, correspondence bias was positively associated with a dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior,

TABLE 2
Prevalence of Correspondence, Reactionary, and No Bias
as a Function of Essay Valence

Type of Bias	Pro-Affirmative Action Essay	Anti-Affirmative Action Essay	Combined
Reactionary bias	22 (11.6%)	53 (28.0%)	75 (19.8%)
No bias	50 (26.3%)	53 (28.0%)	103 (27.1%)
Correspondence bias	118 (62.1%)	84 (44.2%)	202 (53.1%)

TABLE 3
Pearson Correlations of Essay-Attitude Consistency with Age, Education, Income, Independent and Interdependent Self-Construal, and Situationist, Dispositionist, and Interactionist Lay Philosophies of Behavior

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Essay-attitude consistency	0.76	1.56	—	.08	-.04	-.08	.01	-.03	.12*	.02	.10
2. Age	48.06	16.60		—	-.09	-.06	-.11*	.00	.14**	.14*	.11*
3. Education	3.92	1.67			—	.38**	.03	.06	-.16**	-.25**	.01
4. Income	10.10	4.00				—	.07	.03	-.11*	-.07**	.03
5. Independent self-construal	5.26	1.06					—	.23	.02	.10	.21*
6. Interdependent self-construal	4.62	1.06						—	.06	.02	.12*
7. Dispositionist lay philosophy	4.56	1.65							—	.17**	.15**
8. Situationist lay philosophy	4.35	1.72								—	.15**
9. Interactionist lay philosophy	5.73	1.45									—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

and unassociated with situationist or interactionist lay philosophies of behavior. Independent and interdependent self-construals were unrelated to essay-attitude consistency in both the correlational and regression analyses.

DISCUSSION

The current study evaluated the prevalence of correspondence bias in the general population and tested whether within-culture differences in correspondence bias were related to demographic characteristics, lay philosophies of behavior, or self-construals. On average, participants believed that the essay author's attitude was consistent with the position argued in the essay, despite the fact that they learned that the essay position was determined by a coin flip. In other words, mean comparisons indicated that the correspondence bias effect in our national random sample replicated the phenomenon typically observed in college student samples. Other analyses, however, revealed that substantial percentages of people were either unbiased or made noncorrespondent inferences. Approximately half of our sample made correspondent inferences in the attitude attribution context, whereas the other half did not. This contrasts sharply with results of prior studies conducted on college student samples. As previously mentioned, Krull et al. (1999) found that the attitude-attribution paradigm elicited correspondence bias in more than 86% of their samples of university students. Therefore, it appears that college students are more prone to correspondence bias than is the general public.

Because our results were based on a true probability sample of people in the United States, we can conclude that within a small margin of error that roughly 50% of people in the United States are prone to making correspondent inferences, whereas another 50% are not. Of those who did not exhibit correspondence bias, 27%

provided unbiased inferences (i.e., *can't tell*) and about 20% made noncorrespondent inferences (i.e., they perceived the essay author's attitude to be inconsistent with the position argued in the essay). The fact that we found that only about 50% of people are prone to correspondence bias is particularly intriguing, given that the attitude attribution paradigm is known to be a powerful method of inducing correspondence bias (e.g., Masuda & Kitayama, 2004). Of course, research has documented that the prevalence of correspondence bias is sensitive to the specific paradigm within which it is studied and to variations within a single paradigm (e.g., Corneille, Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Walther, 1996). Nevertheless, correspondence bias was far from ubiquitous in the current study, even under conditions especially likely to produce it.

The current study also appears to add a new wrinkle in an old line of attribution research. To the best of our knowledge, it provides the first evidence of noncorrespondent, or reactionary, inferences. One potential explanation for this form of bias is grounded in standard explanations of correspondence bias that center on people's (in)ability to recognize or account for situational constraints on behavior (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). Our results suggest that some people are hyperaware of situational constraints and overcorrect for them. Alternatively or additionally, it may be that our study was uniquely suited to observe noncorrespondent inferences because we intentionally focused on an issue about which the public is equally divided. Unlike the classic Castro essays that espoused view that were uncommon in the population (Jones & Harris, 1967), our data suggested that people expect the base rate of affirmative action attitudes to be about 50% for each side of the issue. Given that base rates of behaviors (Trafimow, Reeder, & Bilsing, 2001) and attitudes (Skitka, Mullen, Griffin, Hutchinson, & Chamberlin, 2002) can influence tendencies to make correspondent inferences, it is possible that our focal issue permitted more variability to

exist in people's expectations about the essay author's true attitude because neither inference was counternormative. Finally, it also is possible that our descriptive analytic strategy allowed us to detect the presence of noncorrespondent inferences, whereas straightforward analyses of the mean would merely identify the overall trend. Even in our sample, the net effect of all participants' inferences was consistent with the correspondence bias phenomenon. Perhaps our large sample size forced us to take seriously rather than dismiss as outliers those who reported noncorrespondent inferences. Regardless of the reason for our results, future research should seek to replicate noncorrespondent inferences and test possible explanations for why they occur.

Lay Philosophies of Behavior and Self-Construals

The current study also tested predictions based on lay philosophy of behavior and self-construal accounts for why people exhibit correspondence bias. Results did not support a self-construal account for correspondence bias but provided limited support for a lay philosophy of behavior account. Specifically, individual differences in independent and interdependent self-construal were unrelated to correspondence bias. Agreement with a dispositionist, but not a situationist or an interactionist, lay philosophy of behavior was associated with a stronger tendency to exhibit correspondence bias. Therefore, results provided some support for the notion that individual difference variables originally proposed to account for cultural differences in attributions can also account for some within-culture variability in correspondence bias.

Despite the positive relationship between a dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior and correspondence bias, a considerable amount of the variability in correspondence bias remains unexplained. One account for the absence of relationships between correspondence bias and self-construals and between correspondence bias and situationist and interactionist lay philosophies of behavior might be that within and between culture differences in attributions are a consequence of different processes. Consistent with this idea, theorists have extensively argued that correspondence bias has multiple causes (Gawronski, 2003; Gilbert & Malone, 1995). Self-construals and lay philosophies of behavior may be better suited to capture cultural differences in attribution than explain within-culture variability (cf. Krull et al., 1999). Alternatively, one might argue that links between correspondence bias and self-construal and between correspondence bias and situationist and interactionist lay philosophies of behavior were absent because within-culture variability in self-construal and lay philosophies of behavior may be small relative to between culture differences. However, as can be seen

in Table 3, each of these variables exhibited considerable variance, and our sample size was more than ample to detect any robust effects. Therefore, we know that a substantial amount of within-culture variability existed in our data, but we still cannot rule out the possibility that between- and within-culture variability differ in some important way.

A third reason why we did not observe effects for self-construal might be related to the reliability of our measures of self-construal. Using shortened versions of Singelis's (1994) measures was a necessary trade-off in obtaining a nationally representative sample, but the items we used were somewhat less reliable than the complete scales. That said, we believe our items had face validity, and the short form we used created the expected two-component solution with items loading unto the appropriate factors. Moreover, reliability in our data was not dramatically different from levels typically reported for the complete measure (e.g., Singelis, 1994; see also Levine et al., 2003). Furthermore, ours is not the first study to fail to detect a relationship between self-construal and correspondence bias in the attitude attribution paradigm (e.g., Krull et al., 1999). Nevertheless, we acknowledge the potential issues associated with interpreting null results, but we hope the results of the current study nonetheless contribute to the conversation in the literature and prompt further examination of the role of self-construal in correspondence bias (Greenwald, 1975).

In conclusion, the present study replicated the classic attitude-attribution demonstration of correspondence bias with a nationally representative sample of adults in the United States and supported the idea that having a dispositionist lay philosophy of behavior is associated with more bias. However, our results also indicated that it would be simplistic to conclude that people in the United States on the whole are dispositionally biased when confronted with attributional contexts like the one used here. Rather, it appears there is about a 50–50 probability that any given person in the United States will make a correspondent inference when presented with an essay written under constraints. Given this nearly even split, it will be important to reexamine expectations about how likely Westerners in general (rather than solely college students) are to exhibit correspondence bias. Moreover, the present study found that a substantial number of people will make noncorrespondent or reactionary inferences at least under certain circumstances. Future research should examine whether individuals' attribution tendencies hold across situations, as well as explore additional explanations for the phenomena. In sum, the present study indicated that even after decades of research, there is still much left to be understood about person perception.

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