

Feather N T. Attribution of responsibility and valence of success and failure in relation to initial confidence and task performance.

J. Personal. Soc. Psychol. 13:129-44, 1969.

[Flinders Univ. South Australia, Bedford Park, South Australia]

This paper showed that subjects were more likely to attribute success or failure to luck rather than to ability when the outcome was unexpected than when it was expected. They were also more satisfied with the unexpected success and more dissatisfied with the unexpected failure than when their expectations were confirmed by the outcome. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited over 155 times since 1969.]

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"I collected the data for this study in 1968. I had spent 1967 at the Institute of Social Research in Ann Arbor working with Jack Atkinson on research into achievement motivation. I also remember meeting Bernie Weiner at UCLA and talking with him about achievement motivation and possible research on causal attribution just before I left the US. On the long sea voyage home to Australia, I spent some of the time thinking about the psychological processes that might underlie how a person makes causal attributions for success and failure and also about the variables that might affect a person's judgments about the attractiveness or aversiveness (positive/negative valence) of achievement-related outcomes. These ideas jelled soon after my arrival at Flinders to take up the foundation chair in psychology, and the study was quickly designed and completed in my first year there.

"It would be wrong, however, to see this study as an excursion into a completely new area. For many years prior to the research I had been involved in applying the expectancy-value approach to the study of human

motivation, especially in relation to achievement behavior. I had also been interested in how balance theory could be applied to model both the cognitive effects of communication between source and receiver and the effects of attitude on the selective recall of arguments.

"The study reported in the 1969 article brought some of these strands together. The paper attempted to achieve a nice balance between theory and empirical findings. I received thoughtful and encouraging comments from Bill McGuire who was then editor of the journal in which the paper was published.

"The article appeared at an opportune time and anticipated a period of active interest in attribution theory among psychologists. It was a forerunner in the attribution field and I think that that is one reason why it is so often cited. The fact that the paper was multifaceted is probably another reason for its frequent citation. The different themes (e.g., attribution, valence, expectancy, balance theory, sex differences) were such as to interest a wide range of psychologists. Indeed, the article is cited in many different contexts that include attribution theory, expectancy models, cognitive theories of human motivation, the analysis of job satisfaction, and the psychology of sex differences.

"I have continued to do research into causal attribution, valence, and expectancy theory since 1968. My recent book, *Expectations and Actions: Expectancy-Value Models in Psychology*, contains a chapter in which the earlier research, including the 1969 study, is reviewed and brought up to date.¹ A theoretical paper provides a conceptual integration of my applications of balance theory to the analysis of communication effects, attribution behavior, and selective recall.² And a recent article presents a theoretical analysis of the conditions under which values may spill over into action, again taking expectations and valences into account.³ The general question of the interrelationships between cognition, affect, and behavior continues to engage me, and the 1969 article was an important step in the development of my ideas."

1. Feather N T. Actions in relation to expected consequences: an overview of a research program. (Feather N T, ed.) *Expectations and actions: expectancy-value models in psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1982. p. 53-95.

2. -----, Organization and discrepancy in cognitive structures. *Psychol. Rev.* 78:355-79, 1971.

3. -----, Human values and the prediction of action: an expectancy-valence analysis. (Feather N T, ed.) *Expectations and actions: expectancy-value models in psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1982. p. 263-89.