Suspicion of Ulterior Motivation and the Correspondence Bias

Steven Fein
Research Center for Group Dynamics, Institute for Social Research and Department of Psychology University of Michigan

James L. Hilton
Research Center for Group Dynamics, Institute for Social Research and Department of Psychology University of Michigan

Dale T. Miller
Princeton University

ABSTRACT

Three studies examined the hypothesis that when perceivers learn of the existence of multiple, plausibly rival motives for an actor's behavior, they are less likely to fall prey to the correspondence bias than when they learn of the existence of situational factors that may have constrained the actor's behavior. In the first 2 studies, Ss who learned that an actor was instructed to behave as he did drew inferences that corresponded to his behavior. In contrast, Ss who were led to suspect that an actor's behavior may have been motivated by a desire to ingratiate (Study 1), or by a desire to avoid an unwanted job (Study 2), resisted the correspondence bias. The 3rd study demonstrated that these differences were not due to a general unwillingness on the part of suspicious perceivers to make dispositional inferences. The implications that these results have for understanding attribution theory are discussed.

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Correspondence may be addressed to James L. Hilton, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106-1248.

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For some time now we have been haunted by a paradox. On the one hand, we are struck by the number of times in our daily interactions when we are unwilling to infer what a person is feeling or thinking on the basis of what the person does. We are, for example, unwilling to conclude that students who praise a lecture are sincere in their praise if they follow the praise with a request for an extension of some deadline. Similarly, we do not believe that every actor who pushes a product on television necessarily believes in the merits of that product. Even our children are not above suspicion. When they offer to stay home from school on a particular day so that they can help their parents around the house, we do not necessarily take their nobly stated intentions at face value.

On the other hand, we are equally struck by the growing evidence in the social psychological literature that indicates that people routinely draw dispositional inferences from the behaviors of others, even if that behavior is highly constrained. Perceivers who read an essay advocating a controversial position, for example, infer that the author privately endorses the advocated position even when it is explained that the author had no choice in writing the essay (Jones & Harris, 1967; Miller, Jones, & Hinkle, 1981; Miller, Schmidt, Meyer, & Colella, 1984; Snyder & Jones, 1974). Similarly, undergraduates who view reenactments of the Milgram (1963) experiment continue to assume that they have learned more about the subjects who obeyed than about the power of the situation (Bierbrauer, 1979). Indeed, the tendency for
perceivers to make dispositional attributions even when the situation provides an adequate explanation for the behavior is so robust that it has been called the *fundamental attribution error* by Ross (1977) and the *correspondence bias* by Gilbert and Jones (1986).

How are we to reconcile our phenomenological experiences with the social psychological literature? Is this paradox simply another instance in which phenomenological experiences fail to map onto the realities of the world, or is it possible that something has been overlooked in the correspondence bias literature? The research reported here begins to address this issue.

By far the most common paradigm in which the correspondence bias has been demonstrated is one in which observers read essays or listen to speeches that were said to have been written under conditions of choice or constraint (for a review of this paradigm, see Jones, 1979). Jones and Harris (1967), for example, had subjects read either a pro- or an anti-Castro speech that was allegedly written under either free-choice conditions or at the experimenter's request. The subjects' task in the experiment was to infer the true attitude of the author of the speech. Not surprisingly, the results showed that subjects inferred a pro-Castro attitude from a pro-Castro speech and an anti-Castro attitude from an anti-Castro speech when the speeches were said to have been written under conditions of free choice. More surprisingly, subjects showed a tendency to infer attitudes that corresponded to the speech, even when it was clear that the authors had no choice about the direction of the speeches. In other words, even when the situation provided a sufficient explanation for the direction of the speech, subjects were still inclined to assume that the direction of the speech reflected the author's true attitude. Subsequent research has shown this effect to be both robust and generalizable across a variety of constraint manipulations (e.g., Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988; Jones, Worchel, Goethals, & Grumet, 1971; Miller et al., 1981; Miller & Rorer, 1982; Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977).

Despite the large number of studies that have documented the existence of the correspondence bias under conditions of situational constraint, a broad search of the person perception literature reveals a few interesting, and possibly instructive, exceptions. Jones, Davis, and Gergen (1961) had subjects listen to actors allegedly interviewing for a job that required a particular interpersonal style (i.e., introversion or extroversion). The actor presented himself as having a personality either consistent or inconsistent with the job description. Consistent with predictions, the results showed that subjects' trait descriptions corresponded most closely to the actor's self-description when that description was inconsistent with the job description. There was, however, a less-noticed result. When the self-descriptions were consistent with the job description, and therefore possibly given in order to get the job, subjects' ratings did not differ from neutral ratings. An actor applying for an introverted job who presented himself as an introvert was judged to be as extraverted as an actor applying for an extraverted job who presented himself as an extravert. In other words, observers' inferences about the personality of the actor were not influenced by the actor's behavior.

Conceptually similar results have been found by Bem (1967). In Bem's study, subjects witnessed a person inform someone else that he or she liked an apparently dull task. Half of the subjects learned that the person had been paid $1 for making the statement and half learned that the person had been paid $20 for making the statement. Consistent with predictions, subjects attributed to the actor a more positive attitude toward the apparently dull task in the low-incentive condition than they did in the high-incentive condition. More interestingly, subjects' inferences in the $20 condition did not differ from the inferences of a control group of subjects who only heard a description of the boring task. In other words, subjects who learned that the person was paid $20 to tell someone else that the task was interesting were unwilling to conclude that the person actually believed it was interesting. Again, we see no evidence of the correspondence bias in this experiment.

What seems common to the two studies we have described is that in each case contextual information (i.e., the prospect of a job and the offer of a $20 incentive) suggests the presence of an ulterior motive. A similar point can be made about the examples in the opening paragraph. When students compliment us and then ask us to extend a deadline, we do not know whether the compliment is genuine or merely reflects their desire for the extension, or some blend of the two motives. Similarly, an actor's endorsement of a product may be motivated by the merits of the product, but it may also be motivated by the actor's desire for compensation. Also, although it is possible that children want to stay home from school so that they can help their parents, it is also possible that they simply want to avoid going to school.

In contrast to the suspicion that exists in each of these cases, in the myriad other studies in which the correspondence bias has routinely emerged, ulterior motivation does not appear to be an issue. Subjects in the Jones and Harris (1967) study, for example, may have wondered whether the writers of the pro-Castro essays held attitudes that corresponded to the essays they had written, but it is unlikely that they questioned why the essays were written in the first place. After all,
there is no ambiguity concerning why the authors in the no-choice conditions took the positions they advocated—they took the positions because the experimenter assigned the positions to them. Indeed, Miller et al. (1984) found that even though the subjects in the no-choice conditions in their study fell prey to the correspondence bias in the inferences they drew about the actor's disposition, more than 63% of the subjects who were in these conditions indicated that they thought the information provided in the experiment was not useful "for making a valid and accurate judgment about the essay writer's personal attitude." Of these subjects, 80% mentioned explicitly that they judged the information to be of little use because the position had been assigned to the writer. These results suggest that in situations such as these, in which coercive or normative elements provide an explanation for the actor's behavior, there is little ambiguity about what motive led the actor to behave as he or she did.

The hypothesis that emerges from this discussion is that the correspondence bias may be less likely to emerge when contextual factors suggest that multiple, plausibly rival motives could underlie the actor's behavior than when contextual factors suggest that the actor's behavior is motivated only by situational constraint. When an actor's behavior appears to be motivated by situational constraint, perceivers will draw correspondent inferences from the target's behavior. On the other hand, when contextual information suggests that more than one motive may underlie an actor's behavior, the suspicion that is aroused may inhibit perceivers from making a correspondent inference, at least until they are able to disentangle the motives involved.

The studies reported here were designed to test this hypothesis. In the first study subjects read about a person who argued for a particular side of a controversial issue. Some of the subjects learned that the person had been instructed to argue the position that he did, whereas other subjects were told that he had been given the option of arguing for either side, but that he may have had ulterior motives for arguing the position that he did. We predicted that subjects who learned that the person had been assigned to argue the position that he did would make inferences about him that were more correspondent with his behavior than would subjects who learned that he had been given the freedom to choose the position he took but may have had somewhat insidious motives for his decision.

**Study 1**

**Method Subjects.**

Subjects were 59 male and female undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory social psychology class at the University of Michigan who volunteered to participate in this study as part of a class demonstration. The subjects were assigned randomly to the experimental conditions.

**Procedure.**

Each subject received a booklet that contained all the instructions and materials used in the experiment. The instructions indicated that the subjects' task during the experiment would be to read selected excerpts from a speech written by a student named Rob Taylor, who was described as a senior at another large university, and to then answer some questions about Rob and his speech. All subjects then read a speech concerned with the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Proposition 42. Proposition 42, which is currently scheduled to go into effect in 1990—1991, will render all students who do not meet particular academic requirements ineligible for athletic scholarships for their first year at school. At the time of this experiment, Proposition 42 was being hotly debated at campuses throughout the United States.

**Manipulating the position argued in the speech.**

Half the subjects read a speech that argued strongly in favor of Proposition 42. This speech emphasized the shockingly poor education many college athletes receive and the problems associated with the pressures of adjusting to college while dedicating so much time to sports. The other half of the subjects read a speech that argued strongly against Proposition 42. This speech emphasized the culturally biased nature of the tests and the lack of opportunities that poor students have to attend good colleges. All of the arguments contained in the two speeches were drawn from the popular media.

**Manipulating the author's apparent motives for writing the speech.**

After reading the speech, all subjects read some background information about the author of the speech. This information
indicated that Rob had applied for and received a summer internship that enabled him to work with a professor during the summer. It further indicated that once accepted, interns were matched with particular professors on a random basis. The subjects assigned to the no-choice conditions went on to read that the internship program required all interns to research an important topical issue and to write a persuasive speech arguing for one particular side of the debate. These subjects then read that the purpose of the speech was to give interns experience in conducting research and communicating their ideas and that the interns were told that the speech should be a top priority given that it would be weighed heavily in the Internship Board's final evaluation of the interns. All of these subjects then learned that the interns had no choice in deciding which side of the Proposition 42 controversy to argue in the speech. Specifically, those subjects who had just read a speech supporting Proposition 42 were told that Rob had been assigned to write a speech arguing in favor of Proposition 42, whereas those subjects who had just read a speech opposing Proposition 42 were told that he had been assigned to write a speech arguing against Proposition 42.

In contrast, the subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions read that the professor to whom Rob had been assigned had instructed him to write a strong and persuasive speech about Proposition 42. All of these subjects then read that the purpose of the speech was to give the author experience in conducting research and communicating his ideas and that it should be a top priority given that it would be weighed heavily in the professor's final evaluation of him. They read further that the professor's instructions had made it clear that Rob was free to argue either in favor of or against Proposition 42. In order to suggest to these subjects the possibility that Rob may have written the speech that he did to ingratiate himself to the professor (Jones, 1964; Jones & Wortman, 1973) rather than because he personally endorsed the advocated position, subjects who had previously read a pro-Proposition 42 speech read that the professor had told Rob that he personally was strongly in favor of Proposition 42, whereas subjects who had read an anti-Proposition 42 speech read that the professor had told Rob that he personally was strongly opposed to Proposition 42.

Dependent measures.

After reading the speeches and the background information, all subjects were given a questionnaire that asked them about their impressions of Rob and of his speech. In addition to some questions that were included as filler items, the questionnaire asked subjects to indicate what position Rob had argued in the speech, what his true attitude about Proposition 42 was, how much he cared about the issue of Proposition 42, what percentage of people in his position would have written a speech that argued the position that his did, what percentage of people in his position would have written a speech that advocated its position as strongly as his did, and why he wrote the speech that he did.

Results Check on the manipulation of position argued in the speech.

To ensure that each subject understood and correctly recalled which position the author of the speech had argued, we asked subjects to indicate on an 11-point bipolar scale whether the author had argued in favor of or against Proposition 42. Three of the subjects in the anti-Proposition 42 conditions and two of the subjects in the pro-Proposition 42 conditions answered this question incorrectly. The data from these five subjects were not used in any of the subsequent analyses. The data from the remaining 54 subjects were subjected to a 2 (pro- vs. anti-Proposition 42 position) × 2 (no choice vs. ulterior motives) analysis of variance (ANOVA). Not surprisingly, subjects in the pro-Proposition 42 conditions rated the speech as arguing much more in favor of Proposition 42 ($M = 3.61$) than did subjects in the anti-Proposition 42 conditions ($M = -3.54$), $F(1,50) = 425.61, p < .001$. There was no significant effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives for writing the speech, $F(1,50) = 1.14, ns$, nor was there a significant interaction between the position argued and the author's apparent motives, $F(1,50) = 1.36, ns$.

Check on the manipulation of the author's apparent motives for writing the speech.

In order to make sure that the manipulation of the author's apparent motives had its intended effect, the subjects' open-ended responses to the question "Why did Rob argue the position that he did in the speech?" were coded according to the motives cited. Consistent with the manipulation's intent, 96% of the subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions wrote that they thought the author may have been motivated by a desire to please his professor. Of these, 33.3% mentioned explicitly that they were not sure whether the author sincerely advocated the position or whether he argued as he did simply to impress his supervisor. Of the subjects in the no-choice conditions, 83.3% indicated that the author argued the position that he did because it was assigned.

In addition to coding the motives cited by the subjects, as an exploratory measure we also counted the number of words
subjects used in response to this question to provide us with some information regarding how much thought was aroused by the question of why the author behaved as he did and how much effort it took to answer this question. We subjected this measure to the $2 \times 2$ ANOVA and found that the subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions used more words in response to this question ($M = 19.13$) than did subjects in the no-choice conditions ($M = 10.67$), $F(1, 50) = 4.06, p < .05$. There was no significant effect for the position argued, nor was there a significant interaction between these two variables (both $F$s < 1).

**Inferences about the author's true attitude.**

Subjects' responses to the question asking about the author's true attitude toward Proposition 42 were measured on the same 11-point scale as their responses to the question asking about the position argued, and they were subjected to the same $2 \times 2$ ANOVA. As expected, the subjects in the pro-Proposition 42 conditions inferred that the author was more in favor of this proposition ($M = 1.25$) than did the subjects in the anti-Proposition 42 conditions ($M = -0.73$), $F(1, 50) = 18.69, p < .001$ (see Figure 1). The effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives was marginally significant, indicating that subjects in the no-choice conditions tended to conclude that the author was more against Proposition 42 ($M = -0.13$) than did subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions ($M = 0.63$), $F(1, 50) = 3.23, p < .08$. Recall, however, that the primary prediction in this study was that subjects who learned that the author had the freedom to choose one of two opposing positions but may have had ulterior motives to choose the position that he argued would be less likely to commit the correspondence bias than would subjects who learned that the author was assigned to argue the position that he did. Supporting our prediction, a significant interaction emerged, $F(1, 50) = 13.89, p < .001$. Simple-effects analyses revealed that of the subjects in the no-choice conditions, those who read a pro-Proposition 42 speech rated the author as being significantly more in favor of Proposition 42 ($M = 1.69$) than did those who read an anti—Proposition 42 speech ($M = -2.27$), $F(1, 50) = 30.77, p < .001$, whereas of the subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions, the difference between the inferences made by those who read a pro—Proposition 42 speech and those who read an anti-Proposition 42 speech did not approach significance ($M$s = 0.87 vs. 0.40, respectively), $F(1, 50) < 1$.

To provide us with a more precise test of this prediction, we calculated a difference score for each subject by taking the absolute value of the difference between the subjects' individual ratings of the attitude expressed in the author's speech and their individual ratings of the author's true attitude. The higher the number, the less the subjects' inferences about the author's true attitude corresponded with their evaluations of his speech. We then subjected the difference scores to the $2 \times 2$ ANOVA and found that, as expected, the position argued had no significant effect, $F(1, 50) < 1$. More important, the predicted main effect for the apparent motives manipulation was found, $F(1, 50) = 12.68, p < .001$. Subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions tended to make inferences about the author's true attitude that were significantly less correspondent with their ratings of the attitude expressed in the author's speech ($M = 3.43$) than did subjects in the no-choice conditions ($M = 1.83$).

We also asked subjects to indicate how much they thought the author cared about the issue of Proposition 42. This question was designed to provide an additional measure of the degree to which subjects drew correspondent inferences from the author's behavior. Consistent with predictions, a main effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives was found, indicating that subjects in the no-choice conditions inferred more concern on the part of the author ($M = 6.29$) than did subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions ($M = 5.13$), $F(1, 50) = 5.61, p < .03$. The position argued did not have a significant independent effect on this measure ($F < 1$), but the interaction between the two independent variables was marginally significant, $F(1, 50) = 3.81, p < .06$. Inspection of the means suggests that the manipulation of the author's apparent motives tended to have a greater impact on the ratings given by the subjects who read an anti—Proposition 42 speech $M = 6.82$ no choice vs. $M = 4.67$ ulterior motives than it did on the ratings given by the subjects who read a pro—Proposition 42 speech $M = 5.85$ no choice vs. $M = 5.60$ ulterior motives.

**Perceived normativeness of the author's behavior.**

Although the results on the dispositional inference measures support our predictions, in order to rule out a normative-based alternative explanation it is important to demonstrate that writing a speech in the direction of the professor's own position is not perceived to be more normative than writing a speech in the direction dictated by the no-choice instructions. To address the issue of the perceived normativeness of the author's behavior, we asked subjects to indicate how many of 100 people in the author's situation would have written a speech that advocated the position that the author's did. Consistent with the intent of the manipulation, the two-way ANOVA revealed that subjects in the no-choice conditions offered significantly greater estimates of the number of people who would have acted as the author did ($M =$
88.38) than did subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions (M = 73.63), F (1, 50) = 5.68, p < .03. The position argued in the speech did not have a significant independent effect on these estimates, F (1, 50) = 1.08, ns. There was, however, a significant interaction, such that the manipulation of the author's apparent motives for writing the speech had a greater impact on subjects who read an anti-Proposition 42 speech M = 92.73 no choice vs. M = 64.80 ulterior motives than it did on subjects who had read a pro-Proposition 42 speech M = 84.69 no choice vs. M = 82.47 ulterior motives; F (1, 50) = 4.47, p < .05.

To ensure that the strength with which the author argued the position advocated in the speech was not perceived to be more normative in the no-choice conditions than in the ulterior-motives conditions, we also asked subjects to estimate how many of 100 people in the author's situation would have written a speech that argued its advocated position as strongly as the author's did. Subjects' responses to this question were subjected to the 2 x 2 ANOVA, and a significant main effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives emerged, indicating that subjects in the no-choice conditions assumed that a greater number of people would have written a speech like the author's (M = 76.58) than did subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions (M = 66.43), F (1, 50) = 4.21, p < .05. There was no significant effect for the position argued, F (1, 50) < 1, nor was there a significant interaction between these two variables, F (1, 50) = 1.92, ns.

Discussion

The results of the first study suggest that the correspondence bias is unlikely to emerge when contextual information suggests that multiple rival motives could underlie an actor's decision to behave in a particular manner. Consistent with numerous previous investigations in which subjects made inferences about a target who was assigned to argue a particular position, when subjects in the current study were told that the author had been assigned to write on a particular side of the Proposition 42 debate, they made inferences about the author's true attitude that reflected a strong correspondence bias. Subjects who read a pro-Proposition 42 speech inferred that the author's true attitude was more in favor of Proposition 42 than did subjects who read an anti-Proposition 42 speech. When, however, subjects were told that the target was free to argue either side of the position but were aware that he may have had an ulterior motive for arguing the side he chose, the correspondence bias failed to emerge. Moreover, this pattern of results cannot be explained by purely normative accounts of the attribution process. Normative accounts of the attribution process (e.g., Jones & McGillis, 1976; Kelley, 1967) maintain that the more expected a person's behavior, the less willing perceivers should be to draw a correspondent inference. In the current study, however, although subjects indicated that the target's behavior was more normative (i.e., expected) in the no-choice conditions than in the ulterior-motives conditions, they were, nevertheless, more willing to draw a correspondent inference when they were in the no-choice conditions.

Although the results from the first study suggest that the presence of an ulterior motive reduces the tendency to fall prey to the correspondence bias, at least two issues remain. First, subjects in the first study did not learn about the author's apparent motives for writing the speech until after they had already read the speech. Although Jones, Riggs, and Quattrone (1979) have found that the correspondence bias emerges whether the actor's behavior is presented before or after the information regarding the constraints put on the actor, it is possible that the procedure had its effect in this study because it increased the salience of the author's apparent motives while decreasing the salience of his behavior. After all, the information concerning the author's apparent motives was one of the last things the subjects received before completing the dependent measures, and this may help account for the effect it had.

Second, and more important, it remains to be seen whether the results from the first study will replicate when the ulterior motivation is one other than ingratiation. After all, it is always possible that there is something unique about the suggestion of ingratiation that leads perceivers to refrain from making a correspondent inference.

To address these issues, we conducted a second study in which the subjects read about an author's apparent motives before they were given an opportunity to observe his behavior and in which the ulterior motive suggested was one other than ingratiation. Once again, we predicted that when the information about the author's apparent motives for writing the speech suggested that more than one motive could underlie the author's behavior, subjects would refrain from drawing a dispositional inference and would be relatively less likely to fall prey to the correspondence bias.

Study 2

Method Subjects.
Seventy-four undergraduates enrolled at the University of Michigan were paid $3 to participate in this study. The subjects were run in small groups, and each subject was assigned randomly to one of the experimental conditions.

**Procedure.**

Each subject received a booklet that contained all the instructions and materials used in the experiment. The instructions indicated that the subjects' task during the experiment would be to read selected excerpts from a speech written by a student named John Sisk and to then answer some questions about John and his speech. All subjects first read background information about John and then read a speech ostensibly written by John that concerned the NCAA's Proposition 42.

**Manipulating the author's apparent motives for writing the speech.**

The information that subjects first read indicated that John Sisk was graduating from high school and that he had been encouraged by his father to apply for a congressional internship for the summer. The subjects who were assigned to the **no-choice conditions** read that John's father convinced him to apply for the internship and that John made it to the second stage of the selection process. These subjects read further that at this stage of the application process, each potential intern was required to write a speech on some issue that was currently being debated in the country, and that the quality of the speech would be an important factor in the Internship Committee's final selection. These subjects then read that all of the interns were required to write a persuasive speech concerning the NCAA's Proposition 42 and that they were given no choice in deciding which side of the debate to argue.

In contrast, the subjects who were assigned to the **ulterior-motives conditions** read that John told his father that he did not want to work as an intern that summer but instead wanted to travel with some friends. His father, however, convinced him to apply for the internship, and he reached the second stage of the selection process. These subjects then read that at this stage of the process, each congressperson interviews the potential interns who would work for him or her and asks each applicant to write a speech. Then they read that "Congressman X" met with John and asked him to write a speech about the NCAA's Proposition 42. Congressman X told John that he could argue either side of the issue and that the quality of the speech would be an important factor in his assessment of John. These subjects learned further that John tried one last time to convince his father that he should travel with his friends, but his father continued to tell him that the internship would be best for him. They then went on to read that one of John's friends suggested to John that he write a terrible speech so that he would not get the job, but that John rejected the idea because his father "would kill me if it was that bad." These subjects then read that John learned which side of the debate Congressman X advocated by reading some of the congressman's previous speeches on the topic. Then, in order to suggest the possibility that John argued the position that he did to reduce his chances of getting the internship rather than because he personally endorsed the advocated position, these subjects learned that John chose to write a speech that argued the position opposite of the position the congressman had previously endorsed.

**Manipulation of position argued.**

Orthogonal to the manipulation of the author's apparent motives, half the subjects read excerpts of a speech ostensibly written by John that argued strongly in favor of Proposition 42, and the other half read excerpts of a speech ostensibly written by John that argued strongly against Proposition 42. Except for minor changes, these excerpts were identical to those used in Study 1.

**Dependent measures.**

After reading the speech and the background information, all subjects were given a questionnaire that asked them about their impressions of John and of his speech. In addition to filler items, the questionnaire asked subjects to indicate what position John had argued in the speech, what his chances were of getting the job, what his true attitude about Proposition 42 was, and how much he cared about the issue of Proposition 42.

**Results Check on the manipulation of position argued in the speech.**

To ensure that each subject understood and correctly recalled which position the author had argued, we asked subjects to indicate on an 11-point bipolar scale whether the author had argued in favor of or against Proposition 42. Three of the
subjects in the anti-Proposition 42 conditions and one of the subjects in the pro-Proposition 42 conditions answered this question incorrectly. The data from these four subjects were not used in any subsequent analyses. The data from the remaining 70 subjects were subjected to a 2 (no choice vs. ulterior motives) \( \times \) 2 (pro— vs. anti—Proposition 42 position) ANOVA. As expected, subjects in the pro—Proposition 42 conditions rated the speech as arguing much more in favor of Proposition 42 (\( M = 4.03 \)) than did subjects in the anti—Proposition 42 conditions (\( M = -4.18 \), \( F(1, 66) = 1,053.53, p < .001 \). There was no significant effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives, \( F(1, 66) = 2.64, ns \), nor was there a significant interaction between position argued and apparent motives (\( F < 1 \)).

**Evaluations of John’s chances of getting the job.**

To ensure that subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions tended to recognize that the position the author advocated in his speech was unlikely to endear him to Congressman X, we asked all subjects to evaluate the author's chances of getting the job for which he applied. Consistent with the intent of our manipulation, a significant main effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives emerged, indicating that subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions thought the author's chances of getting the job were smaller (\( M = -1.35 \)) than did subjects in the no-choice conditions (\( M = 0.73 \), \( F(1, 66) = 6.69, p < .02 \). There was no independent effect for the manipulation of position argued, nor was there an interaction between the two variables (both \( F \) 's < 1).

**Inferences about the author's true attitude.**

Using the same 11-point scale as the one they used to rate the attitude expressed in the author's speech, subjects answered the question, "What do you think John's true attitude is toward Proposition 42?" Their responses were subjected to the same 2 \( \times \) 2 ANOVA. A main effect for position argued emerged, indicating that subjects in the pro—Proposition 42 conditions inferred that the author was more in favor of this proposition (\( M = 1.56 \)) than did subjects in the anti—Proposition 42 conditions (\( M = -1.53 \), \( F(1, 66) = 61.83, p < .001 \) (see Figure 2). As in the first study, however, the interpretation of this effect is qualified by the presence of the predicted interaction between the two manipulations, \( F(1, 66) = 40.32, p < .001 \). Simple-effects analyses again revealed that subjects in the no-choice conditions were more likely to fall prey to the correspondence bias than subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions. Subjects in the no-choice conditions who read a pro-Proposition 42 speech rated the author as being significantly more in favor of Proposition 42 (\( M = 3.07 \)) than did those who read an anti-Proposition 42 speech (\( M = -2.67 \), \( F(1, 66) = 99.61, p < .001 \), whereas no such difference emerged among the subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions (\( M s = 0.24 \) vs. \(-0.50 \), respectively), \( F(1, 66) = 1.99, ns \). The independent effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives was not significant (\( F < 1 \)).

As in the first study, a difference score reflecting the absolute difference between each subject's rating of the author's true attitude and each subject's rating of the attitude expressed in his speech was computed for each subject. Once again, higher numbers indicate less correspondence (i.e., greater divergence) between the behavior and the inferred disposition. As expected, the 2 \( \times \) 2 ANOVA revealed that the position argued had no significant effect on these scores, \( F(1, 66) < 1 \), nor did it interact significantly with the manipulation of the author's apparent motives, \( F(1, 66) = 2.31, ns \). The predicted main effect for the author's apparent motives, however, did emerge, \( F(1, 66) = 36.24, p < .001 \). Subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions made inferences about the author's true attitude that were significantly less correspondent with their ratings of the attitude expressed in the author's speech (\( M = 3.78 \)) than did subjects in the no-choice conditions (\( M = 1.33 \)).

We also asked subjects to indicate how much they thought the author cared about the issue of Proposition 42. Consistent with predictions, a significant main effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives was found, indicating that subjects in the no-choice conditions inferred more concern on the part of the author (\( M = 6.76 \)) than did subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions (\( M = 4.19 \), \( F(1, 66) = 22.95, p < .001 \). The manipulation of position argued had no significant effect on this measure, nor did it interact with the manipulation of the author's apparent motives (\( F \) 's < 1).

**Discussion**

The results from the second study again provide support for the hypothesis that the correspondence bias is unlikely to occur when contextual information suggests that more than one motive may underlie an actor's decision to behave in a particular way. Subjects who learned that the actor had the freedom to choose which side of the Proposition 42 debate to endorse in a speech, but that he may have chosen the side that he did to avoid being selected for an unwanted job,
refrained from making dispositional inferences that reflected the correspondence bias. Subjects who learned that the actor had written a pro-Proposition 42 speech were no more likely to infer a pro-Proposition 42 attitude than were subjects who learned that the actor had written an anti-Proposition 42 speech. In contrast, subjects who learned that the actor had no choice in deciding which side of the debate to write about made dispositional inferences that reflected the correspondence bias. These findings emerged even though (a) the information concerning the author's apparent motives was learned prior to learning how the author behaved and (b) the ulterior motive suggested was one other than ingratiation. As such, they further demonstrate that the presence of an ulterior motive can serve as a powerful inhibitor of the correspondence bias.

Although the first two studies demonstrate that the presence of an ulterior motive makes it less likely that perceivers will commit the correspondence bias, they do not shed much light on the nature of the resulting psychological state. At various points in the article, we have referred to this state as one of suspicion because the presence of an ulterior motive casts doubt on the dispositional meaning of the target's behavior. But what is the appropriate way to characterize this state? One possibility is that once the specter of ulterior motivation is raised, perceivers become conservative in their judgments and simply refrain from making any dispositional inferences. Perceivers who are suspicious may conclude that the presence of more than one motive casts doubt on everything that the actor does and may subsequently suspend virtually all processing of information relevant to the actor. On the other hand, a second possibility is that once the specter of ulterior motivation is raised, perceivers begin a more controlled, thoughtful processing of information about the actor. That is, rather than shutting down the processing of information relevant to the actor, suspicion may lead perceivers to become more vigilant in their processing of information about the actor. Suspicious perceivers may consciously wonder about the dispositional implications of the actor's behavior and search for cues that can disambiguate the motives behind that behavior. At least partial support for this latter view can be found in the results of the first study, where subjects who were suspicious about the author's motives tended to write more when asked why the author behaved as he did.

**Study 3**

The third study was designed to begin addressing this issue in a more direct manner. Do perceivers who are suspicious become conservative in their judgments and refrain from processing subsequently encountered information that is relevant to the actor? Or do they begin a more thoughtful processing of actor-relevant information in which they are willing to draw dispositional inferences if information can be found that will help disambiguate the dispositional meaning of the actor's behavior? To address this issue, half the subjects in the third study read about an actor whose behavior was constrained by the situation, and half read about an actor whose behavior may have been motivated by a desire to ingratiate. Orthogonal to this manipulation, half the subjects read subsequent information about the actor that described a situation in which the actor behaved in a noningratiating manner, and half did not read this additional information.

If perceivers become conservative when they are suspicious, then the information about the actor's subsequent behavior should have little effect on the inferences that subjects draw. Support for this hypothesis in the current study would emerge in the form of a main effect for the manipulation of the actor's apparent motives, unqualified by the interaction between the apparent motives manipulation and the manipulation of information concerning the actor's subsequent behavior. If, on the other hand, perceivers begin a more thoughtful processing of information about the actor when they are suspicious, then subjects who are suspicious and who receive additional information indicating that the actor is not the kind of person who tends to ingratiate should rule out ingratiation as an ulterior motive and should be more willing to draw correspondent inferences from the actor's behavior than should subjects who are suspicious but who do not receive this additional information. In the current design, support for this hypothesis would emerge in the form of an interaction between the manipulation of the actor's apparent motives and the manipulation of information concerning the actor's subsequent behavior. Only subjects who are suspicious and who receive no disambiguating information concerning the actor's apparent motives should refrain from drawing a correspondent inference from the target's behavior.

**Method Subjects.**

Subjects were 100 undergraduates enrolled at the University of Michigan who participated in this study to fulfill the research requirement of their introductory psychology course. Subjects were run in small groups, and each subject was assigned randomly to one of the experimental conditions.
Procedure.

Each subject received a booklet that contained all the instructions and materials used in the experiment. The instructions indicated that the subjects' task during the experiment would be to read selected excerpts from a speech written by a college student named Kevin Davidson and to then answer some questions about Kevin and his speech. All subjects first read some background information about Kevin and then read a speech ostensibly written by Kevin that argued strongly in favor of the NCAA's Proposition 42. Except for minor changes, this speech was the same as the pro-Proposition 42 speech used in Study 2.

Manipulating the author's apparent motives for writing the speech.

The methods used to manipulate the author's apparent motives in this study were virtually identical to those used in Study 1, with the following three exceptions. First, subjects in the present study read the background information, which contained the manipulation of the author's apparent motives, before they received the excerpts from the author's speech. Second, this information indicated that the student had applied for and received an internship that allowed him to work with a member of Congress ("Congressman X"), in contrast to the information read by the subjects in the first study that indicated that the internship allowed the student to work with a university professor ("Professor X"). Third, whereas in Study 1 the position argued in the student's speech was manipulated, all the subjects in the present study read a pro-Proposition speech. The subjects in the no-choice conditions of this study learned that the student was assigned to argue in favor of Proposition 42. The subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions, on the other hand, learned that although the student was given the freedom to argue either side of the issue, he knew that the congressman was in favor of Proposition 42, and he subsequently chose to argue in favor of Proposition 42.

Manipulation of additional information.

Orthogonal to the manipulation of the author's apparent motives for writing the speech, half the subjects were assigned to the no-information conditions and the other half were assigned to the additional-information conditions. After reading the background information about Kevin, all subjects read excerpts from his pro—Proposition 42 speech. The subjects in the no-information conditions were given no further information before receiving the dependent measures. The subjects in the additional-information conditions, however, were given some additional background information about Kevin before they received the dependent measures. These subjects read that after Kevin turned in his speech he continued to do various tasks for Congressman X. They also read about an incident in which Kevin and some friends went to a movie and saw Congressman X and his wife in the theater. Kevin saw that the Congressman had changed his hairstyle since their meeting, and Kevin and his friends agreed that it looked rather bad. As they were leaving the theater, Congressman X and his wife saw Kevin and went over to chat with him. The Congressman asked Kevin what he thought of his new haircut. Kevin answered, "Well, to tell you the truth, I think it looked better before." They then chatted briefly about the movie. Congressman X said that he did not like it, but Kevin said that he did like it. They both did agree that the lead actor was outstanding. After reading this information, the subjects completed the questionnaire.

Dependent measures.

After reading Kevin's speech and, if available, the additional background information, all subjects received a questionnaire that asked them about their impressions of Kevin and of his speech. In addition to some questions that were included as filler items, the questionnaire asked subjects to indicate what position Kevin had argued in the speech, what his true attitude about Proposition 42 was, and how much he cared about the issue of Proposition 42.

Results Check on the manipulation of direction of the speech.

To ensure that each subject understood and correctly recalled which position the author had argued, we asked subjects to indicate on an 11-point bipolar scale whether the author had argued in favor of or against Proposition 42. Three of the subjects answered this question incorrectly, and their data were dropped from all of the subsequent analyses. The data from the remaining 97 subjects were subjected to a 2 (no choice vs. ulterior motives) × 2 (no information vs. additional information) ANOVA. As expected, neither the manipulation of the author's apparent motives for writing the speech, nor the manipulation of the presence or absence of additional information, had any significant independent effects (F's < 1), or interactive effects, F(1, 93) = 1.50, ns, on subjects' ratings of Kevin's speech.
Inferences about the author's true attitude.

Using the same 11-point scale, subjects answered the question, "What do you think Kevin's true attitude is toward Proposition 42?" Their responses were subjected to the same 2 × 2 ANOVA. The main effect for the presence versus absence of additional information failed to emerge, $F(1, 93) = 2.55, ns$ (see Figure 3). The main effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives, however, was significant, with subjects in the no-choice conditions rating the author's true attitude as more strongly in favor of Proposition 42 ($M = 2.42$) than subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions ($M = 1.61$), $F(1, 93) = 5.40, p < .03$. The interpretation of this effect, however, is qualified by the presence of a marginally significant interaction between the two manipulations, $F(1, 93) = 3.31, p < .08$. Consistent with the notion that suspicious perceivers suspend their judgments until the motives of the actor can be determined more clearly, simple-effects analyses revealed that among the subjects who were in the ulterior-motives conditions, those who received the additional information made inferences that were significantly more correspondent ($M = 2.21$) than did those who did not receive the additional information ($M = 1.04$), $F(1, 93) = 5.99, p < .02$. Not surprisingly, these analyses also revealed that for subjects in the no-choice conditions, there was no significant difference between the inferences made by the subjects who had received the additional information ($M = 2.38$) and the inferences made by the subjects who had not received this information ($M = 2.46$), $F(1, 93) < 1$.

As in the first two studies, we again computed a difference score for each subject by taking the absolute value of the difference between the subjects' individual inferences about the author's true attitude from their individual evaluations of the attitude expressed in the author's speech, and again subjected these scores to the 2 × 2 ANOVA. Once again, higher numbers on the difference score indicate less correspondence. A main effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives emerged, $F(1, 93) = 5.99, p < .02$. Subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions tended to make inferences about the author's attitude that were less correspondent with their ratings of the author's speech ($M = 2.29$) than were the inferences made by subjects in the no-choice conditions ($M = 1.63$). Similarly, a main effect for the manipulation of additional information emerged, $F(1, 93) = 5.25, p < .03$. Subjects who received no additional information tended to make inferences that were less correspondent ($M = 2.27$) than did subjects who received the additional information ($M = 1.65$). The interpretations of both of these effects, however, are again qualified by the presence of the interaction between the two manipulations, $F(1, 93) = 5.15, p < .03$. Consistent with the notion that suspicious perceivers temporarily suspend their judgments, simple-effects analyses revealed that for the subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions, the presence of additional information had an impact on the degree to which they were willing to make correspondent inferences. Subjects who received the additional information made inferences that were more correspondent ($M = 1.63$) than did subjects who did not receive the additional information ($M = 2.88$), $F(1, 93) = 10.63, p < .01$. In contrast, the presence of additional information had no apparent effect on the degree to which subjects in the no-choice conditions were willing to infer that the author's attitude corresponded with their evaluations of his speech $M_{\text{no information}} = 1.63$ vs. $M_{\text{additional information}} = 1.63; F < 1$.

We also asked subjects to indicate how much they thought the target cared about the issue of Proposition 42. As with our other measures of the subjects' inferences about the author, a main effect for the manipulation of the author's apparent motives emerged, indicating that subjects in the no-choice conditions estimated more concern on the part of the author ($M = 6.21$) than did subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions ($M = 5.29$), $F(1, 93) = 5.37, p < .03$. Similarly, a main effect for the manipulation of additional information emerged, indicating that the subjects who received the additional information about the author estimated that he cared more about the issue ($M = 6.15$) than did subjects who did not receive the additional information ($M = 5.35$), $F(1, 93) = 4.01, p < .05$. Once again, however, the interpretations of both effects are qualified by the presence of a marginally significant interaction between the two manipulations, $F(1, 93) = 3.14, p = .08$. Simple-effects analyses again revealed that among the subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions, those who received the additional information inferred that the author cared more about the issue ($M = 6.04$) than did the subjects who did not receive this additional information ($M = 4.56$), $F(1, 93) = 7.30, p < .01$. No such effect emerged among the subjects in the no-choice conditions ($M = 6.25$ vs. $M = 6.17$, respectively; $F < 1$).

**Discussion**

The results of the third study illustrate that perceivers who are suspicious about an actor's motives are quite willing to draw inferences that are correspondent with the actor's behavior, provided information is available that can disambiguate the actor's motives. Subjects were hesitant to draw correspondent inferences from the actor's behavior when they were aware that his behavior might have been motivated by the desire to ingratiate, however, when the actor's behavior subsequently disambiguated the motives underlying his original behavior, subjects were willing to draw correspondent
inferences from his original behavior. As such, the results of the third study suggest that perceivers who become suspicious of an actor's motives do not turn a deaf ear on the actor's subsequent behavior, but rather they continue to attend to the actor's behavior and actively process attributionally relevant information.

Similarly, although the inferences that subjects in the no-choice conditions drew from the actor's behavior were virtually identical to the inferences drawn by subjects in the ulterior-motives/additional-information condition, it is important to note that the ways in which they arrived at these inferences were quite different. Recent research investigating the issue of when perceivers spontaneously ask themselves why an actor behaved in a particular way indicates that unless perceivers' expectations are disconfirmed or their sense of control or self-image is challenged, they often do not bother to think in attributional terms (e.g., Hastie, 1984; Liu & Steele, 1986; Pittman & D'Agostino, 1985; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1981). Indeed, some have suggested that subjects make correspondent inferences when they find themselves in no-choice conditions, like the ones employed here, precisely because they do not bother to ask themselves why the actor behaved as he or she did (e.g., Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1981). In contrast, subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions arrived at a correspondent inference only after engaging in relatively sophisticated attributional thinking. Subjects in these conditions apparently wondered about the dispositional meaning of the author's behavior and arrived at a correspondent inference only if they received information that disambiguated his motives.

**General Discussion**

The current research provides strong support for the hypothesis that suspicion about the true motives underlying an actor's behavior can serve as a powerful antidote to the correspondence bias. In each of the three studies, subjects who learned that an actor may have had more than one motive for behaving as he did responded as though his behavior provided them with no reliable information about his dispositions. Subjects who saw an actor argue in favor of a controversial proposal, for example, were unwilling to conclude that he privately endorsed the proposal when they were aware that his decision to argue in favor of the proposal may have been motivated by a desire to ingratiate himself to a superior. Similarly, subjects who saw an actor argue against a proposal were unwilling to conclude that he really opposed the proposal if they were aware that he may have argued as he did to avoid being selected for an unwanted job. In contrast, when subjects in each of the three studies were aware that an actor's behavior was motivated solely by situational constraint, they consistently fell prey to the correspondence bias.

**Implications for Understanding the Correspondence Bias**

The present studies were designed primarily to test the hypothesis that suspicion would serve as an antidote to the correspondence bias, but they may have more general implications for understanding this bias. To date, two explanations have been offered for the correspondence bias. One explanation focuses on mechanisms of anchoring and adjustment. Quattrone (1982), for example, has argued that the salience of a target's behavior leads perceivers to make an initial inference that corresponds to the behavior. Perceivers then correct this inference for any constraints inherent to the situation, but in doing so they fail to adjust sufficiently from the anchor (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). More recently, Gilbert et al. (1988) have extended Quattrone's analysis by arguing that social perception consists of a series of three qualitatively distinct processes that vary in the extent to which each is performed automatically. The first process, categorization, involves identifying the appropriate category that fits a person's behavior. Loud sobs and wet eyes, for example, are perceived as crying rather than as distinct, unrelated behaviors. The second process, characterization, involves drawing a dispositional inference from the person's behavior. Writing a pro-Castro speech, for example, leads to the inference that the person has a pro-Castro attitude. The third process, correction, involves adjusting the dispositional inference for any constraints inherent to the situation. Categorization is said to be more automatic than characterization, which is, in turn, said to be more automatic than correction. According to their analysis (Gilbert et al. 1988), the correspondence bias emerges because perceivers draw dispositional inferences (i.e., engage in characterization) rather automatically and then fail to devote enough cognitive resources to the task of correcting these inferences for any constraints that may have affected the actor's behavior.

The present results cannot identify which of the stages identified by Gilbert et al. is the one affected by suspicion. We suspect that suspicion may affect both characterization and correction. Suspicion may interfere with the automatic nature of characterization while motivating perceivers to devote more cognitive resources during the correction process. Indeed, the distinction between characterization and correction becomes blurred in situations in which multiple motives are implicated by an actor's behavior. Imagine, for example, an executive who must decide whether the compliments her subordinates have showered on her latest plans for the company reflect their true beliefs. On the one hand, it is possible
to cast the problem as one of correction and argue that she first makes a dispositional inference (i.e., that they like her proposal) and then corrects that inference for the possibility that her subordinates may have had ulterior motives for claiming to have liked the proposal. According to this casting, ulterior motives are corrected for in much the same way that the presence of facilitatory or inhibitory factors in the environment are corrected for when inferences are made about someone's ability. On the other hand, it is possible to cast the problem as one of characterization and argue that until the motivational ambiguity surrounding her subordinates' behavior is resolved, she cannot know which dispositions are implicated in their behavior. Their behavior could tell her something about their true attitudes, but it may only tell her something about the nature of their moral fiber.

The second, perhaps more parsimonious, explanation of the correspondence bias is that perceivers tend to give greater weight to the person than they do to the situation when they make attributions (Heider, 1958). According to this explanation of the bias, the current manipulations may have had their effect because the presence of multiple motives frames the problem of causality in terms that are internal to the actor. When perceivers are confronted with situational constraint, their task is to partition causality between the person and the situation. When, for example, perceivers see someone perform poorly on a difficult task, they have to decide how much of the causality resides in the person and how much resides in the difficulty of the task. To the extent that perceivers consistently give greater weight to the person than to the situation, they will tend to conclude that the poor performance reflects poor ability rather than task difficulty. In contrast, the task facing perceivers who are confronted with multiple motives is to partition causality between factors that are all internal to the target. Subjects in the ulterior-motives conditions of the first study, for example, had to decide whether the direction of the speech reflected the actor's desire to speak the truth, his desire to ingratiate, or some combination of the two motives. Their task did not require them to partition causality between situational factors and personal factors.

When the results are examined from this perspective, two things become apparent. First, the current results suggest that the correspondence bias may reflect a specific failure to discount sufficiently for situational constraint rather than a general failure to discount. Second, although the results look much as if perceivers in the ulterior-motives conditions are more accurate, in the sense that they appear to discount appropriately, it may be misleading to assume that this will always be the case. Fein, Hilton, and Miller (1989), for example, have found preliminary evidence indicating that suspicious perceivers tend to respond more to the plausibility of an explanation than to the probability that the explanation is correct. Specifically, they asked subjects to read about a young man who was ardently courting a very wealthy widow. Even though love would seem to be a more probable explanation for the man's behavior than would greed, the subjects were unwilling to conclude that they had learned anything about the man's love for the woman. In such instances suspicion may lead perceivers to become overly cautious when making correspondent inferences.

Final Thoughts: Probing the Phenomenology of Suspicion

Following Kelley's (1967, 1971) seminal formulations, research and theory on causal attribution proceeded under the assumption that there are no important differences between social and nonsocial inference. The current research challenges this assumption by demonstrating that information about ulterior motivation (a factor that only arises in the context of social behavior) has different effects on trait inference than information about situational constraints (a class of factors that apply to both nonsocial and social domains). As such, the current research opens the door to the possibility that there may be some uniquely social facets of causal attribution when suspicion is aroused. To be in a state of suspicion is to be uncertain, but uncertain in a special way. Knowing that a person did well on an easy exam or made a pro-Castro speech at the request of the experimenter leaves an observer uncertain as to the actor's true ability or opinion, but the uncertainty would not be characterized as suspicion. The state of suspicion seems only to arise when there is ambiguity about one particular class of causes—motivation.

References


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Figure 1. Inferences of the author's true attitude toward Proposition 42 as a function of the position argued in the speech and the apparent motives of the author in Study 1.

http://content.apa.org/images/psp/1990/may/S_psp585753fig1a.jpg

Figure 2. Inferences of the author's true attitude toward Proposition 42 as a function of the position argued in the speech and the apparent motives of the author in Study 2.
Figure 3. Inferences of the author's true attitude toward Proposition 42 as a function of the apparent motives of the author and the presence or absence of additional information about the author in Study 3. (Higher numbers indicate greater correspondence.)