Succumbing to the Fundamental Attribution Error When Viewing Ingratiation
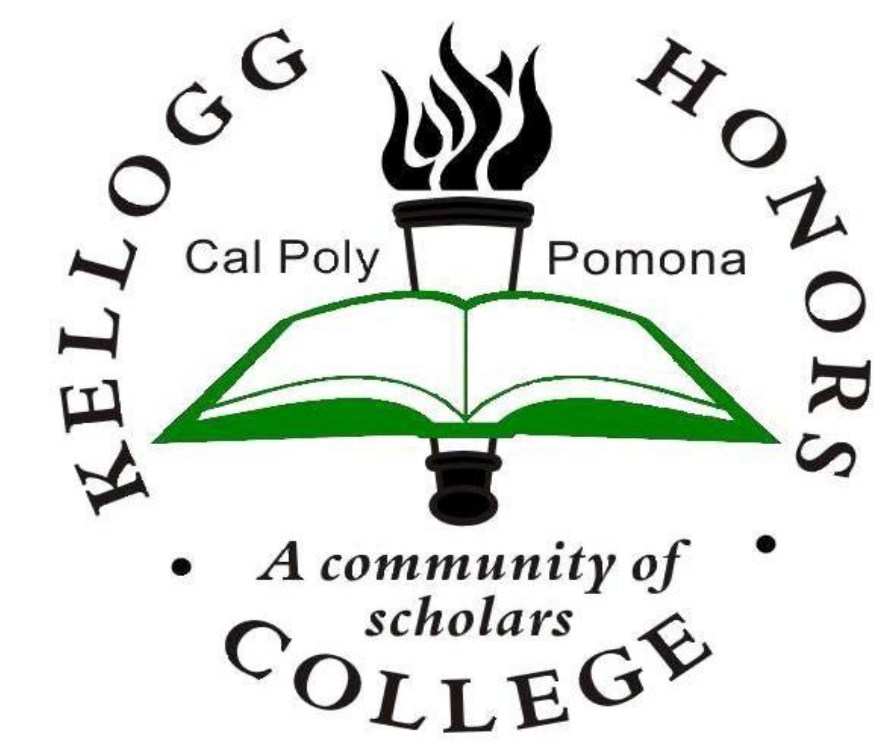
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Introduction

What is ingratiation?
Ingratiation is the process of changing one's behavior in the attempt to become more attractive or likeable to others

What is the fundamental attribution error?
The fundamental attribution error, also known as the correspondence bias, is the tendency to attribute one's behavior to situational components and other's behavior to dispositional components i.e. "I'm angry because I was stuck in traffic this morning. He's angry because he is an angry person." The fundamental attribution error also explains why we always put ourselves in the best light, a privilege we do not extend to others.

Previous Research
Proost, Schreurs, De Whitte, & Derous, 2010 found that when compared to using no influence method, or when using self-promotion, ingratiation was the least likely to enhance someone's hirability.

Vonk 1998, found that actors who interact with their superiors in a likeable way and interact with their subordinates in an unlikeable way seen as "slimy", this is known as "the slime effect

In the 2012 study by Langford, Beehr & Von Glahn, they compared a measure of likeihood to vote, which was determined by a 5-point Likert agreement scale, to a 3-item electability measure. Their findings did indicate that the fundamental attribution error might effect a person's perceptions of one's own as opposed to others' detection of ingratiation (Langford, Beehr, & Von Glahn 2012).

The purpose of the current research is to specifically test with us vs. them measures, and we believe we will find similar results with regards to voting.
Hypothesis 1: Participants will rate their own likelihood of voting for the interview candidate lower than how they believe others' likelihood of voting for the candidate will be.
In traditional workplaces, it is unlikely that one would be voting on who would be their new leader. We believe the fundamental attribution error will extend to hirability.
Hypothesis 2: Participants will rate their own hirability rating of the interview candidate lower than they will rate how they believe others hirability of the candidate will be.
Finally, in a more general sense, we believe the fundamental attribution error will apply to how much you like the person verses how much they like the person.
Hypothesis 3: Participants will rate their own liking of the interview candidate lower than they will rate how they believe others liking of the candidate will be.

Method

Participants
Participants were collected from the Cal Poly Pomona SONA system. In totally there were 83 participants, 43 females and 40 males. The average participant age was 20.

Materials
Four videos were created, each with the same script and location but with different actors. The video depicted a job interview for a human resources position. The job candidate in the video made comments such as, "I love your watch! Where did you get it?" and, "…this is the nicest office I have ever been in!"

Procedure
Trials were randomly assigned to be a regular trial or a voting trial. In the regular trial, the participants were only told that they would watch a video and answer some questions about it. In the voting trial, participants were asked to imagine that they worked for the company who was hiring, and that they got to place a vote to determine who would receive the position. They were also told that the person who was hired would be their direct supervisor.
In both trial types, once instructions were given, participants began the experiment, which was hosted on the website Survey Monkey. The video the participants watched was randomly assigned by Survey Monkey. Once the video was completed, participants moved on to the survey. They were first asked how much they liked the job candidate, and how much they believed others would like the job candidate. If the participant was in the regular trial they were asked how likely they would be to hire the job candidate and how likely others would be to hire the job candidate. In the voting trials, participants were asked how likely they would be to vote for the job candidate and how likely others would be to vote for the job candidate. They were then asked to describe the job candidate with an open ended response. The remainder of the survey included scales for perceived authenticity of job candidate, femininity and masculinity of participant, neosexism of participant, and social desirability of participant. Lastly demographic information of participants were taken, they were debriefed and dismissed.

Likelihood of Hiring Job Candidate Means

Likelihood of Hiring Job Candidate

Results

In regards to hypothesis 1, there were no significant difference between self reported liking of the job candidate and the perceived liking others may have for the job candidate. (M= 4.56, M=4.68)

There was a significant difference between the self reported likelihood of hiring the job candidate and the perceived likelihood of others hiring the job candidate such that individuals felt they themselves were less likely to hire the candidate than others. This supports hypothesis 2 (M=4.24, M=4.71) t(df) = t-obt, p<.05.

For hypothesis 3, there was also no significant difference between self reported likelihood of voting for the job candidate and the perceived likelihood of others voting for the job candidate. (M=4.55, M= 4.48)

We had noticed the way participants had described the job candidate on the survey did not always indicate that the participant understood or realized the job candidate was being ingratiating. We went back and coded the responses to the participants descriptions as related to ingratiation, unrelated to ingratiation but positive and unrelated to ingratiation but negative. We assumed that we would then find results that more closely matched our hypotheses, however, those findings were the same as our initial findings.

Discussion

Finding only a significant difference between the likelihood of oneself hiring the job candidate and others hiring the job candidate is very surprising. Not only was there no significance between the "us vs. them" voting opinions, it actually had the opposite pattern of what was predicted. The likelihood of voting was predicted to be higher for "them" measures than the "us" measures, however the "us" measures were slightly higher than the "them" measures.

Our results could have occurred for a number of reasons. One issue was that the majority of participants were freshman and sophomores (67%). Due to being lowerclassmen, they may not have had the opportunity to have experienced a professional internship, or perhaps even a job. Without these professional experiences, some of them may never have had a job interview and may lack an understanding of how one is supposed to act in a job interview. This may have caused them to believe that the ingratiating job candidate was acting as one was supposed to in a job interview.

References

Langford, S., Beehr, T., Von Glahn, N. (2012) *Voting for organizational leaders: Expanding our definition of leader emergence.* Manuscript submitted for publishing

Proost, K., Schreurs, B., De Witte, K. and Derous, E. (2010), Ingratiation and Self-Promotion in the Selection Interview: The Effects of Using Single Tactics or a Combination of Tactics on Interviewer Judgments. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 40: 2155–2169
Vonk, R. (1998). The slime effect: Suspicion and dislike of likeable behavior toward superiors. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*, 849-864.

Likelihood of Voting for Job Candidate

Liking of Job Candidate