

# Cognitive Processes and Conflict in Close Relationships: An Attribution-Efficacy Model

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A recently proposed model of cognitive processes underlying conflict in close relationships (Doherty, 1978, 1981a, 1981b) is revised and tested in two studies. Central to the original model are the causal attributions made for conflict and the perceived efficacy or ability to resolve conflict. The model is revised to incorporate judgments of responsibility and to provide a closer link to self-efficacy theory. The first study examines attributions and efficacy expectations in mother-child relationships. As anticipated, only weak evidence was obtained for predictions retained from the original model, highlighting the relationship-specific nature of cognitive processes for conflict in families. A second study examines husband-wife relationships and provides evidence for the usefulness of an attribution-efficacy model for marital conflict. The attributional component of the model received greater support than that pertaining to efficacy expectations. In both studies, support was obtained for the proposal that the relation between conflict dimensions (e.g., blame) and causal dimensions is mediated by judgments of responsibility. The significance of the revisions to Doherty's model for understanding conflict in close relationships is discussed, and several avenues for further research are outlined.

Most violent acts occur between friends and family members and begin with conflict over "trivial" issues (Hotaling, 1980). However, the processes underlying conflict escalation are poorly understood. One promising means of elucidating such processes is research on causal and responsibility attributions in close relationships. For example, distressed spouses, relative to their nondistressed counterparts, tend to view the causes of negative partner behaviors as reflecting enduring, global characteristics of the partner (e.g., Fincham, 1985a; Fincham, Beach, & Nelson, 1987; Fincham & O'Leary, 1983; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985). Such attributions are likely to lead to the reciprocation of negative behavior and conflict escalation, potentially resulting in the coercive spiral found in relationships characterized by aggression between partners (Patterson, 1982). Unfortunately, there has been no research to examine directly attributions for conflict-related behavior in close relationships; hence this argument relies on data obtained outside of the con-

text of interpersonal conflict. The lack of empirical research on this topic is surprising, as theoretical analyses of family violence emphasize the importance of attributional processes (e.g., Gelles & Straus, 1979; Hotaling, 1980). The purpose of this article is (a) to integrate a model of cognitive processes in family conflict proposed by Doherty (1978, 1981a, 1981b) with our own work on attribution and thus provide a more comprehensive account of attributions in close relationships and (b) to examine empirically the cognitive processes underlying conflict between intimates.

## A Model of Cognitive Processes for Conflict in Close Relationships

According to Doherty (1981a), conflict in a close relationship initiates two cognitive processes. The first concerns determining why the conflict arose. Here the model draws heavily on attribution theory. The second process entails determining whether the conflict can be resolved. This aspect of the model is based on self-efficacy theory. The attribution or explanation for the conflict and the perceived efficacy or ability of the dyad or family to resolve the conflict are hypothesized to influence various aspects of the conflict. These include (a) the extent to which conflict on a specific topic generalizes to other areas of the marriage, (b) the occurrence of blame, (c) the foci of efforts made to resolve the conflict, and (d) whether such efforts occur.<sup>1</sup>

Although it is possible to test Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b)

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<sup>1</sup> Doherty (1981a, p. 7) referred to blaming attitudes ("resentful and punitive thoughts and feelings") and blaming behaviors ("negative punitive actions"). In this article judgments of blame are studied, as these

model as it was originally stated, to do so would ignore several relevant theoretical and empirical developments that have taken place since the model was formulated. As a consequence, we first evaluate the model in terms of these developments and propose several revisions to the model. Data are then reported that allow the predictions retained from the original model and our revisions to be examined. Before presenting the data we will consider in more detail the attribution dimensions and efficacy expectations hypothesized to underlie conflict. In each case, their role in Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) model is briefly presented and several revisions to the original model are then outlined. Finally, three issues concerning the application of the model are discussed.

### *Attribution Dimensions*

**Original model.** In Doherty's (1978, 1981a) model, attributions for conflict are analyzed in terms of several causal dimensions. The most important of these dimensions is the locus of the cause to which the conflict is attributed. Doherty (1978, 1981a) identified six potential causal loci: self, other, relationship, external environment, theological causes, and luck, chance, or fate.<sup>2</sup> The locus of the cause determines the significance of the remaining attribution dimensions for efficacy judgments, conflict generalization, and blame. That is, the effect on conflict of attribution dimensions regarding the global nature of the cause, its stability, the extent to which it reflects voluntary behavior, and positive motivation depends on who or what is seen to be the cause of the conflict (i.e., causal locus).<sup>3</sup> For example, when one spouse views the other as the cause of a marital conflict, the extent to which he or she attributes the other's behavior to stable characteristics (e.g., dispositions rather than transient mood) is hypothesized by Doherty (1981a) to correlate positively with conflict generalization. However, when this person sees herself or himself, environmental circumstances, the marriage, or fate as the cause of the conflict, no relationship is hypothesized between the perceived stability of the cause and conflict generalization. These and numerous additional relations hypothesized in Doherty's (1978, 1981a) model between attribution dimensions and blame, conflict generalization, and efficacy expectations are shown in Table 1.

**Revision of model.** The model just outlined provides an initial framework within which to investigate attributions for conflict between intimates. However, recent theoretical and empirical developments in both the social psychological and clinical literatures suggest important changes to the attributional component of the model. Doherty (1978) did not distinguish between causal attribution and responsibility attribution. This is a problem because these two forms of judgment are different both at the conceptual level (Fincham & Jaspars, 1980; Shaver, 1985; Shaver & Drown, 1986) and in respect to the findings of basic research on responsibility attribution (Fincham & Roberts, 1985; Fincham & Shultz, 1981; Shultz, Schleifer, & Altman, 1981) as well as in applied, clinical research (Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987; Fincham, Beach, & Nelson, 1987). Briefly stated, judgments of causation involve establishing what

Table 1

*Hypothesized Relations Between Attribution Dimensions and Blame, Conflict Generalization, and Efficacy Expectations in Doherty's (1978) Model*

Attribution dimensions	Blame		Conflict generalization	Efficacy
	Other	Self		
Self	—	+		
Global			+	—
Stable				—
Voluntariness				+
Other	+	—		
Global			+	—
Stable			+	—
Voluntariness	+			
Motivation	+		+	—
Environment	—	—		
Stable				—
Relationship	—	—		
Global				
Stable			+	—
Fate	—	—		

*Note.* The higher the attribution dimension in the rows, the higher (+) or lower (—) the dimension in the columns. Blank slots show that no prediction was made by Doherty (1978).

produced an event or outcome and thus involve analysis of past events. Responsibility, in contrast, typically concerns accountability for the outcome once a cause is established and is more closely related to current concerns about the partner or the relationship.<sup>4</sup> Recognition of this distinction between causal and responsibility attribution shows that Doherty (1981a) conflated dimensions of causality (i.e., locus, globality, and stability) with criteria for responsibility attribution (i.e., voluntariness and motivation of behavior). Reconceptualizing some of Doherty's (1981a) "causal" attribution dimensions as responsibility attribution criteria shows, in turn, that the responsibility attribution criteria incorporated into the model are incomplete. In fact, recognition of the distinction between causation and responsibility points to three revisions of Doherty's (1978, 1981a) model.

<sup>2</sup> The usefulness of distinguishing the last two categories (i.e., theological causes and luck, chance, and fate) is not clear, and because they are likely to yield low base rates, they are collapsed into a single category (labeled *fate*).

<sup>3</sup> Doherty (1981a) used the word *intent*, understood as a dimension ranging from positive through negative, to refer to the motivation that gives rise to a behavior. Because a distinction between intentional and unintentional behavior is made later in the article, we use the word *motivation* to characterize the dimension that Doherty labeled *intent*. In this article, the word *intent* is used to refer to behavior that is intentional rather than unintentional or accidental.

<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, once a person is determined to be responsible or accountable for an outcome, she or he can be blamed or praised for his or her behavior (see Fincham & Bradbury, in press, and Shaver, 1985, for a complete discussion of the distinctions between cause, responsibility, and blame).

First, it is important to revise the model to distinguish clearly between causal and responsibility attributions and to expand the dimensions considered in rendering responsibility attributions. Thus, one element of a revised model requires the inclusion of the assessment of responsibility attributions for conflict. This makes the model more consistent with recent theoretical analyses (e.g., Fincham, 1985b) and with empirical research on attributions in close relationships (e.g., Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987; Fincham, Beach, & Nelson, 1987) in which responsibility attributions play a central role. The determination of responsibility in close relationships rests heavily on the inference of intent; in fact, a freely chosen action intended to bring about the outcome that then actually occurs comprises the quintessential act for which one can be held responsible (Hart, 1968). Thus, the criterion of intent also needs to be added to the responsibility criteria already included in the model.<sup>5</sup> We hypothesize that judgments of intent will relate positively to efficacy expectations when the self is the causal locus, as one's own intentional behavior can easily be changed. When the other person is the perceived causal locus, intent should be positively related to responsibility because intentionality is a salient cue used to determine responsibility (Hart & Honoré, 1959). The relations hypothesized for intent are the same as those predicted for the voluntariness dimension in Doherty's (1981a) model (see Table 1).

A second addition to the model concerns elements that appear to be necessary before family members can be held responsible or accountable for their conflict-related behavior. These include judgments that they possess (a) the ability to foresee that a behavior will result in conflict, (b) knowledge of alternative, conflict-avoidant behaviors, and (c) the ability to carry out such alternative actions (Fincham & Emery, in press; Fincham & Roberts, 1985). The importance of these judgments is emphasized by the fact that reattributing or reframing a negative behavior or conflict in terms of a skill deficit is often used in the early stages of therapy to change the blaming attitudes found in distressed couples and families (e.g., Fincham, 1983). We hypothesize that these judgments of capacity will be positively related to focus of change efforts directed toward the other person. This is because it is most appropriate to try to influence another person when he or she has the necessary abilities to behave appropriately. Thus, a complete model of attributional processes for conflict behavior will consider judgments concerning the capacities necessary for a person to be held responsible for conflict-related behavior as well as those relating to responsibility attribution criteria and causal attribution dimensions.

A third extension of the model that results from our distinction between causal and responsibility attributions is the need to clarify the relation between these two judgments and their joint relation to the conflict dimensions in Doherty's (1978, 1981a) model. We propose that causal dimensions, responsibility criteria, and capacities all influence responsibility attributions and that it is responsibility judgments that, in turn, influence the assignment of blame. This proposal reflects a refinement of the entailment model proposed by Fincham and Jaspars (1980). According to the entailment model, blame judgments presuppose judgments of responsibility that, in turn, presuppose judgments of causal locus (i.e., causal judgments lead to responsibility judgments lead to blame judgments). The present model suggests that in addition to causal locus, the stable

and global nature of the cause influences responsibility. It also specifies that other factors besides causal dimensions (i.e., responsibility criteria and capacities) determine responsibility.

In sum, recognition of the distinction between causal attribution and responsibility attribution leads to three major revisions of Doherty's (1978, 1981a) model. These include the explicit assessment of responsibility judgments and the addition of intent as a responsibility criterion, the introduction into the model of the capacities necessary for a person to be held responsible for conflict-related behavior, and the specification of a model relating causal, responsibility, and blame judgments.

### *Efficacy Expectations*

*Original model.* The second major component of Doherty's (1978, 1981b) model is efficacy expectations. This construct refers to "the individual's expectations for the couple or family as a group to engage in effective problem-solving activity" (Doherty, 1981b, p. 35). As noted earlier, these expectations are determined in part by causal attributions. Thus, for example, the model predicts that when the cause of a conflict is seen to be stable, efficacy expectations are likely to be low (see Table 1). In addition, efficacy expectations are hypothesized to determine persistence in attempts to resolve conflicts. Conversely, high efficacy expectations should show a negative relation with helpless responses whereby the individual gives up and does nothing to try to resolve the conflict. Doherty (1978, 1981b) also predicted an interactive effect between causal locus and efficacy expectations: Given high efficacy, causal locus is thought to determine the object of conflict resolution efforts. That is, a person who believes that effective problem solving is possible will direct his or her behaviors differently depending on where she or he considers the cause of the problem to reside. Thus, for example, change efforts will be directed toward the self when the person sees himself or herself as the cause of the problem (e.g., *conflict due to his or her lack of self-control*) and toward environmental circumstances when these are considered the cause of the problem (e.g., *marital conflict due to interfering in-laws*). However, given low efficacy expectations, the perceived cause of the conflict is unimportant because the person is unlikely to engage in problem-solving behavior.

*Revision of model.* Four revisions to the original model arise from a close examination of efficacy expectations. As Doherty's (1978, 1981b) model is based on a broader theory of self-efficacy, an initial revision is suggested by the very manner in which the construct of efficacy expectations is introduced into his model. An efficacy expectation concerns the belief "that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (Bandura, 1977, p. 79). As noted, however, Doherty (1978, 1981b) defined efficacy in terms of the engagement in problem-solving behavior. He thus introduced a further motivational component to the construct. But Maddux, Sherer, and Rogers (1982) found that increments in self-efficacy expectations do not necessarily produce corresponding increases in the

<sup>5</sup> Additional criteria (e.g., negligence) can be found in general models of responsibility attribution (see Fincham & Jaspars, 1980; Shaver, 1985). In the context of close relationships these do not appear to be as central as intent (Fincham, 1985b), and their introduction would unnecessarily complicate an already complex model.

intention to perform the behavior. This finding suggests that there are important differences between the construct of self-efficacy as outlined by Bandura (1977) and the efficacy expectations in Doherty's (1978, 1981b) model. Thus, in order to relate efficacy expectations in close relationships to the broader framework of self-efficacy theory, it is important to conceptualize efficacy expectations solely in terms of mastery expectations. Consequently, the construct of efficacy is limited to beliefs about mastery in the revised model.

A second, related concern is Doherty's (1978, 1981b) assumption that only efficacy expectations pertaining to the dyad or family as a group are relevant to conflict resolution. This assumption is based on the view that conflict resolution requires the collaborative efforts of all involved in the conflict. However, this is not necessarily the case. For example, conflict over the clothes worn by one's spouse can be resolved simply by changing one's own standards regarding the spouse's appearance. In this and similar examples, no collaboration or change on the part of the spouse may be required. Efficacy expectations defined solely in terms of the dyad or family may therefore not reflect the true extent to which a person feels that she or he can influence conflict resolution in close relationships. Consequently, in the revised model, efficacy expectations regarding both the self and the dyad or family are accorded equal status.

A third area of concern is the conceptual status of efficacy expectations in the overall model. Although Doherty (1978, 1981b) explicitly linked his work to research on learned helplessness, expectations are not granted the same status that they enjoy in every version of learned helplessness theory (see Alloy, 1982; Fincham & Cain, 1986). In learned helplessness theory, causal attributions are hypothesized to influence expectations, which in turn constitute a sufficient condition for the cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and affective deficits associated with learned helplessness. From this perspective, expectations mediate the relation between causal attributions and the deficits associated with helplessness. Doherty (1978, 1981b), however, hypothesized that causal attributions have a direct impact on helpless responses, although the exact nature of the impact was not specified. In this conception, expectations constitute a variable that moderates the relation between causal attributions and the deficits associated with learned helplessness. If Doherty (1978, 1981b) was correct and expectations do not mediate the impact of causal attributions on helplessness, then the relation between causal attributions and helplessness should still be significant when efficacy expectations are partialled out of the relation. In these studies, therefore, we test this proposal.

Finally, Doherty's (1978) view that people with high efficacy expectations direct their focus of change efforts toward the perceived cause of the problem is a questionable one. An alternative hypothesis is that change efforts are directed toward that which is most easily influenced and likely to produce conflict resolution. For example, one might still believe that one's spouse's penchant for outrageous clothes is the cause of the conflict over his or her appearance but acknowledge that a change in one's own expectations is the easiest means of resolving this conflict. However, many attribution theorists (e.g., Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973) believe that causal attributions are made in order to control one's environment, and hence it is easy to argue that what is perceived as controllable is most often a candidate for perception as a cause. Consequently, focus of change efforts

may often, but not invariably, mirror perceived causation in the way that Doherty (1978) suggested.

In sum, several revisions to Doherty's (1978, 1981b) model arise from a conceptual analysis of efficacy expectations. The revisions involve restricting efficacy expectations to feelings of mastery, including in the model efficacy expectations relating to individuals as well as to dyads and families, clarifying the status of efficacy expectations as a mediating or moderating variable, and specifying that efficacy expectations may sometimes, but not always, determine focus of change efforts made in an attempt to resolve conflict.

### Application and Further Revisions of the Model

Three issues arise concerning the application of Doherty's (1978) model to various close relationships. First, it is presented as a general model without regard to the nature of the relationship under consideration.<sup>6</sup> We hypothesize that the particular form of the close relationship studied will influence the usefulness of the model. The model is unlikely to apply, for example, when children's perceptions of relationships are investigated. More important, even adults' perspectives are likely to differ depending on the relationship under consideration. For instance, the hierarchical structure of parent-child relationships is likely to affect responsibility judgments independently of causal attribution dimensions because of the parent's role responsibility. Similarly, helpless responses are unlikely to occur in most normal families because they run counter to the parental duty to socialize the child. As a consequence, two classes of relationships are examined in order to test the generalizability of the model across family relationships. More specifically, we hypothesize that the model will receive stronger support in regard to the husband-wife relationship than the parent-child relationship.

Second, recent findings show the existence of biases in attribution of blame and responsibility regarding the self versus spouse (Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987a). For example, an egocentric bias has been found such that spouses assume greater responsibility for relationship events than partners are willing to attribute to them. To the extent that such biases arise from an attempt to protect one's self-esteem, they are likely to influence the assignment of blame to the self by, for example, restricting the range of responses given for these judgments. Such a response pattern is likely, in turn, to affect the relationships predicted by Doherty's (1978) model. We therefore hypothesize that a greater number of the predicted relations between attribution dimensions and blame will be obtained when judgments are made about the other person than about the self.

Third, there is considerable evidence to show that depression is related to causal attributions (see Peterson, Villanova, & Raps, 1985) and that causal and responsibility attributions in close relationships vary according to relationship satisfaction (see Baucom, 1986; Bradbury & Fincham, 1987a, 1987b; Fincham, 1985b). It is therefore important to show that the re-

<sup>6</sup> Doherty (1981a) did point out, however, that the voluntariness of the other person's behavior may be of greater importance in parent-child conflict.

lations hypothesized in any model of attributional processes of conflict in close relationships are not simply a function of depression and relationship satisfaction.

Two studies were conducted to test predictions retained from Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) original model and the revisions outlined here. The first investigates mothers' cognitions regarding conflict with their fifth-grade children, and the second examines conflict in marital relationships.

## Study 1

### Method

**Subjects.** The mothers of fifth-grade children attending a public school situated in a middle-class neighborhood of a midwestern town were invited to participate in the study. Only mothers were invited to participate, because previous surveys of parents by Fincham showed that mothers were more likely than fathers to participate in research done through the local school. Fifty-six mothers (approximately 59%) agreed to participate in the study. The average age and education of the participants was 36.2 ( $SD = 4.5$ ) years and 14.3 ( $SD = 2.2$ ) years, respectively. The median family income was \$30,000–\$35,000.

**Materials.** As Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) model and the revisions noted earlier have not been evaluated empirically, it was necessary to devise questions that inquired about each of the numerous elements in the model. A pool of potential items was generated and then evaluated by three graduate students familiar with Doherty's model and the proposed revisions. Each person independently selected items that she or he felt most accurately reflected the elements of the model. Only items on which there was consensus ( $n = 24$ ) were used in the study.<sup>7</sup> The items assessed attribution dimensions, efficacy expectations, and conflict dimensions.

The attribution items can be divided further into those that assess (a) causal dimensions (e.g., locus, "Conflicts in our relationship are due to the things I say or do"; stability, "The causes of our conflict do not change over time"; globality, "The causes of our conflict affect many areas of our relationship"); (b) responsibility criteria (e.g., motivation, "The things my child says or does that contribute to conflict between us are intended to be negative or unhelpful"; voluntariness, "The things my child does or says that contribute to conflict between us are things that he or she freely chooses to do"; intent, "The things my child . . . are done intentionally rather than unintentionally"); and (c) capacities (e.g., knowledge, "My child says or does things that contribute to conflict between us because she or he does not know how to do things differently"; foreseeability, "Usually, my child could have anticipated that what she or he said or did would contribute to conflict between us").

Efficacy expectations were evaluated by items concerning each person's sense of mastery or ability to perform the behaviors needed to resolve the conflict (e.g., "I am able to do the things needed to settle our conflicts"). The conflict-dimension items assessed conflict generalization (e.g., "When conflict on a specific topic occurs, it has a negative impact on the things I say or do in most areas of the relationship"), blame (e.g., "My child is to blame for the conflicts that occur between us"), the object of change needed to resolve the conflict (e.g., "The conflicts that occur between us will be settled when outside circumstances (e.g., job pressures, school personnel) change"), and helplessness responses (e.g., "My child has given up trying to do anything to settle the conflicts that occur between us"). In addition, ratings of responsibility were obtained (e.g., "I am responsible for the conflicts that occur in our relationship"). Where appropriate, items were included to assess the elements of the model for both the self and the child (e.g., blame, responsibility, helplessness). Each statement was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The following instructions were given:

Negative as well as positive things happen between parents and children. In fact, all parents and children experience disagreements or conflicts in their relationship, even if they are only very minor ones. The following statements refer to conflicts or disagreements that occur between you and your child. Please circle the number that indicates how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

Measures of relationship satisfaction and depression were also obtained. Satisfaction was measured by adapting the first item of the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) to assess mothers' satisfaction with the mother-child relationship. This procedure was followed as this item in the MAT is heavily weighted and correlates highly with the overall scale score. Thus, mothers were asked:

Mothers sometimes feel perfectly happy or satisfied with the relationships between themselves and their children. At other times, they feel very unhappy or dissatisfied with their relationships. We would like you to indicate your *overall* feeling about the relationship between you and your child. Check the dot on the line below that best describes the degree of happiness or satisfaction, all things considered, of your relationship with your child. The dots on the line represent the different degrees of happiness.

The 9-point scale was anchored at each end by the terms *very unhappy or dissatisfied* and *perfectly happy or satisfied*, respectively. The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) served as the measure of maternal depression. This instrument has high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and correlates highly with clinical ratings of depression, behavioral measures of depression, and other depression scales (Beck & Beamesderfer, 1974). Finally, a demographic questionnaire was administered.

**Procedure.** Each child was given an envelope of materials to take home to his or her mother. These materials consisted of a demographic questionnaire, the assessment of dimensions relating to the attribution-efficacy model, the BDI, and the satisfaction rating together with a letter inviting the mother to participate in a survey on parent-child relationships. Mothers were offered \$8 for their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses was assured. Completed materials were returned in a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

## Results and Discussion

Analyses pertaining to Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) original model are presented first, followed by those concerning the revised model.

**Original model.** Correlations between Doherty's (1978) attribution dimensions, efficacy expectations, and conflict dimensions were computed. For the dimension of causal locus, these correlations used the whole sample. As the relationships posited for the remaining dimensions are dependent on causal locus, only those subjects who endorsed the causal locus (scored above

<sup>7</sup> We did not try to develop an assessment instrument relating to each dimension of the model. This is because (a) the large number of dimensions in the model would have necessitated an inordinately large number of items overall; (b) it is extremely difficult to generate more than one or two items for the dimensions (e.g., the item "I am to blame for the conflicts that occur between us" seems to be a straightforward means of assessing self-blame, and this question can also be stated in the negative; besides these two options, however, it is not clear how else one can directly assess self-blame); and (c) the present research constitutes an initial attempt to evaluate the usefulness of the model and might provide data to justify the intensive psychometric work needed to develop scales relating to the model's various dimensions. To the extent that our approach is less than optimal, this should militate against finding any theoretically meaningful pattern of results. A copy of the items used in these studies is available from Frank D. Fincham.

**Table 2**  
*Correlations Between Attribution Dimensions and Blame, Conflict Generalization, and Efficacy Expectations for Mother-Child Relationships*

Attribution dimensions	Blame		Conflict generalization	Efficacy	
	Other	Self		Couple	Self
Self	-.19	.09			
Global	.32*		.53**	-.03	-.25
Stable				.03	.32
Voluntariness				.18	.07
Other	.21	.13		-.41*	-.48**
Global			.44**	-.04	-.19
Stable			.12	-.14	-.07
Voluntariness	.26*				
Motivation	-.10		.13	-.27*	-.21
Environment	-.12	.08			
Stable				-.16	-.07
Relationship	-.19	.22			
Global			.32*		
Stable				-.14	-.07
Fate	.13	.11			

*Note.* Significant correlations not predicted by the original model are shown in italics.

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

the midpoint of the scale) that was implicated in a hypothesis were used to compute the relevant correlation. Table 2 displays the obtained correlation coefficients that correspond with those predicted by the original model (see Table 1). In addition, significant correlations that were not predicted are shown in italics. Table 2 shows that only a minority (5 of 25, or 20%) of the relations hypothesized were found to be significant. Three of the 5 significant correlations concern the relation between the global nature of the cause and conflict generalization. The findings obtained for the global causal dimension accord with previous research, as this dimension is the one for which significant results are consistently found in the literatures relating attributions to depression (Peterson & Seligman, 1984) and to marital satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1987a, 1987b).

Recall that Doherty (1978, 1981b) hypothesized that efficacy expectations and causal attribution dimensions relate to helplessness responses. The correlations obtained between efficacy expectations and helplessness and between causal attributions and helplessness were not significant. Thus, no evidence was found to support this hypothesis. In contrast, the hypothesis that causal locus interacts with efficacy to determine the object of conflict resolution efforts was supported. That is, given high efficacy expectations (a score above the midpoint of the scale), causal locus was significantly related to the object of change efforts for self,  $r(56) = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ; for relationship,  $r(56) = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and for external circumstances,  $r(56) = .31$ ,  $p < .05$ . Only the child as causal locus was unrelated to identifying the child as a focus of change. None of the correlations between incongruent causal loci and objects of change was significant.

As anticipated, these results show that the overall applicability of Doherty's (1978) model to parent-child relationships is open to question. This may reflect, in part, the anticipated lack

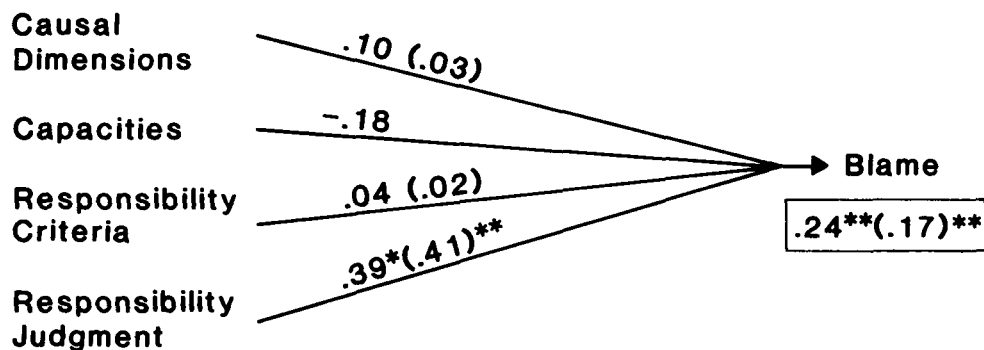
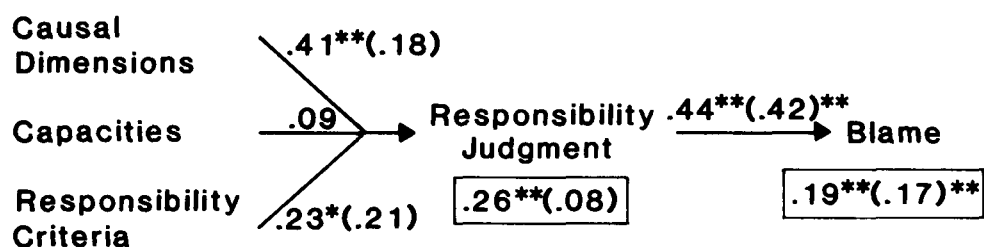
of variability in efficacy expectations and helpless responses in parent-child relationships. In fact, direct examination of these responses reveals that a majority of the respondents believed that they had the ability to resolve the conflict—73% agreement, 11% disagreement, and 16% undecided;  $\chi^2(2, N = 56) = 40.42$ ,  $p < .001$ —whereas none admitted to being helpless (75% strongly disagreed).

*Revised model.* An important feature of the revised model is the explicit assessment of responsibility judgments. Responsibility judgments are hypothesized to mediate the relation between causal attributions, responsibility criteria, and capacities on the one hand and blame on the other. If this hypothesis is indeed correct, then the lack of any relation between blame and the attribution dimensions in Doherty's model seen in Table 2 is not surprising. To test this mediational hypothesis, we formed three compound indexes relating to the causal dimensions, responsibility criteria, and capacities, respectively. That is, responses to items assessing responsibility criteria were summed, those assessing capacities were summed, and those pertaining to the causal dimensions were summed.<sup>8</sup> These indexes were formed owing to (a) the limited sample size, which precluded the testing of complex causal models, and (b) their acceptability at a conceptual level, as the items comprising each index are hypothesized to relate to responsibility and blame in the same manner.

A model in which responsibility judgments play a mediational role (revised model) was tested against one in which it did not play this role (original model). Figure 1 shows the path coefficients, which serve as indexes of the causal relationships specified in path models, associated with the original and revised models for judgments relating to both the self and the child. The large sample chi-square test (Kim & Kohout, 1975) can be used to determine whether the two models fit the data equally well. The nonsignificant value obtained, both for other,  $L(3) = .02$ ,  $p > .10$ , and for self,  $L(3) = .001$ ,  $p > .10$ , judgments, shows that the models did not differ. This indicates that the additional paths from causal dimensions, capacities, and responsibility criteria to blame are redundant. These analyses were repeated after the effects of parental satisfaction and maternal depression were removed from blame judgments. Nearly identical values were obtained, a result that was expected in view of the fact that satisfaction and depression accounted for less than 1% of the variance in blame judgments. In sum, these analyses are consistent with the revised model because assigned responsibility appears to play the role of a mediating variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Two further predictions were made regarding attribution dimensions in the revised model. First, we predicted that the pattern of relations posited by Doherty (1978) for his attribution dimension of voluntariness would also be found for judging conflict-related behavior as intentional. No support was obtained for this prediction. Second, the relation predicted be-

<sup>8</sup> Two separate indexes were formed for the causal dimensions, and these pertained to either the self or the other. In each case, the relevant causal locus was added to the responses given for the global and stable dimensions. This approach was adopted because it is the pattern of judgments across these dimensions that has been emphasized in past research on causal attributions in close relationships (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1987b).

**(a) Original Model****(b) Revised Model**

Note: Numbers in boxes are  $R^2$  values; all other numbers are path coefficients.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

Figure 1. Path models relating to judgments for the other and self (in parentheses) in the mother-child relationship.

tween judgment of capacities and seeing the other as an object for change efforts was confirmed,  $r(56) = .33, p < .01$ .

As regards efficacy expectations, the revised model postulated that efficacy expectations of the dyad and of the individuals would be equally important. Support was obtained for this hypothesis in that the pattern of results for the perceived efficacy of the dyad was similar to that regarding efficacy expectations concerning only the self (see Table 2). Finally, in view of the limited variance obtained in regard to helpless responses, the differing predictions of Doherty's (1978) model and learned helplessness theory could not be examined in a meaningful manner.

### Study 2

The results of Study 1 provide limited support for the predictions made in Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) model regarding the relations between attributions dimensions and blame, conflict generalization, and efficacy expectations. The strongest

data related to the revision of the model that centered around judgments of responsibility. This finding is perhaps not surprising, as lay persons see the characteristic "responsible for" as distinguishing the parent-child relationship from other close relationships (Clarke, Allen, & Dickson, 1985). These results therefore need to be replicated in regard to a different relationship in order to establish their generalizability. It would be inappropriate to reject an attribution-efficacy model of conflict in close relationships on the basis of these data alone, despite the fact that Doherty (1981a, 1981b) cited examples from the parent-child relationship in presenting the original model. Rather, as argued earlier, the model may be best conceived as applying to partners of similar status in a close relationship. Consequently, data pertaining to the marital relationship are examined in this study.

Three further issues were also examined in Study 2. First, the number of factors seen to cause conflict in Study 1 may have varied across subjects. It is likely that the number of perceived causes for conflict will influence the hypothesized relations in-



volving causal dimensions. This is because the characteristics of all the causes are likely to be considered when ratings of efficacy, conflict generalization, and blame are made. Thus the relations between the characteristics of any one cause and these judgments are likely to be attenuated. Consequently, a measure of the perceived number of causes for the conflict is obtained in this study. Second, an assumption was made in Study 1 that may not be tenable. We assumed that it is sufficient to assess judgments of helpless behavior because they yield results that are simply the mirror image of those likely to be obtained for judgments of persistence in conflict resolution. This issue is also explicitly investigated by obtaining judgments of both persistence and helplessness. Finally, the study provides an opportunity to replicate Fincham, Beach, and Baucom's (1987) finding that the discrepancy between assignment of blame to the partner and to the self is related to marital satisfaction.

### Method

**Subjects.** Subjects were 34 couples who were participating in a longitudinal survey on marriage. They had been recruited via advertisement in a local newspaper. The couples had been married an average of 7.3 ( $SD = 6.6$ ) years and had a median family income of \$20,000–\$25,000. Husbands were 31.7 ( $SD = 7.1$ ) years of age and had 14.9 ( $SD = 2.4$ ) years of formal education. Corresponding figures for wives were 30.8 ( $SD = 6.8$ ) and 14.4 ( $SD = 1.7$ ), respectively.

**Materials.** The items used in Study 1 to assess attributions, efficacy expectations, and conflict dimensions were reworded, where appropriate, so that they referred to "my partner" rather than "my child." In addition, a question was added to assess the number of causes seen to underlie conflict behavior ("There are a number of causes for the conflicts that occur between my partner and me"). The extent to which both the self and the partner persisted in conflict resolution behavior was also assessed (e.g., "My partner keeps on trying to do things that will settle the conflicts that occur between us").

The BDI was again used as a measure of depression. Marital satisfaction was assessed by using the MAT. This test is widely used in marital research, has satisfactory reliability (split half, .90), and discriminates between nondistressed spouses and spouses who have documented marital problems (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

**Procedure.** Participants were mailed materials that they returned in a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The importance of independent completion of the materials sent to husband and wife was emphasized both during a telephone call to verify that the materials had been received and in written instructions. Couples were paid \$20 for their participation.

### Results and Discussion

To facilitate the comparison of results from the two studies, the findings of this study are presented in the same manner as those of Study 1.

**Original model.** Table 3 contains the correlation coefficients that correspond to the relations hypothesized by Doherty (1978). In contrast to Study 1, a majority of the predicted relations (16 of 25, or 64%) were found to be significant. Correlations were computed a second time, partialing out the number of causes seen to underlie the conflict. The partial correlation coefficients were slightly higher (range = 0–.08) than the original coefficients, but the pattern of findings remained the same. It is noteworthy that 5 of the 9 hypothesized relations that were not confirmed involved judgments about the self or implicated the self as causal locus. As argued earlier, this suggests that attri-

Table 3

*Correlations Between Attribution Dimensions and Blame, Conflict Generalization, and Efficacy Expectations for Marital Relationships*

Attribution dimensions	Blame		Conflict generalization	Efficacy	
	Other	Self		Couple	Self
Self	-.02	.15			
Global	.49**		.46**	-.16	.00
Stable				-.34*	-.37*
Voluntariness				.30*	.30*
Other	.23*	-.21			
Global			.42*	-.44*	-.42*
Stable	-.19		.53*	-.42*	-.49*
Voluntariness	.72**		.28		
Motivation				-.56*	-.28
Environment	.00	-.02	.28		
Stable				-.43**	-.40
Relationship	.08	-.25*			
Global			.58**		
Stable				-.51*	-.44
Fate	-.20	-.25*			

*Note.* Significant correlations not predicted by the original model are shown in italics.

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

butional processes relating to the self may differ from those involving the partner.

Turning to the predictions made regarding efficacy expectations, Doherty (1978) hypothesized that efficacy expectations are inversely related to helplessness and directly related to persistence. First, it is worth noting that helplessness and persistence in conflict resolution behavior were indeed negatively related as had been assumed in Study 1,  $r(68) = -.36, p < .001$ . Although efficacy expectations were inversely related to helplessness as predicted,  $r(68) = -.23, p < .05$ , no evidence was obtained to support a direct relation between efficacy expectations and persistence,  $r(68) = -.05, p > .10$ . The finding regarding persistence may reflect the fact that seeing oneself as efficacious does not lead to the perception of one's behavior as persistent because being efficacious is not seen to require persistence. In any event, these results point to the usefulness of distinguishing these two responses to conflict by showing that they have different correlates.

Efficacy expectations are also hypothesized to interact with causal locus to determine focus of change efforts, a prediction that received some support in Study 1. Given high efficacy expectations (a score above the midpoint of the scale), causal locus again related to the object of change efforts for external circumstances,  $r(68) = .42, p < .01$ , and for partner,  $r(68) = .38, p < .01$ . However, partner causal locus was also inversely related to change efforts directed to external circumstances,  $r(68) = -.45, p < .01$ , whereas seeing the relationship as the causal locus was positively related to external circumstances as an object of change efforts,  $r(68) = .36, p < .05$ . This pattern of findings is consistent with our earlier suggestion that causal locus and focus of change efforts may often, but not invariably, correspond.

**Revised model.** Compound indexes were formed for causal



attribution dimensions, responsibility criteria, and capacities in the same manner as in Study 1. This was done to test the revision of the model relating to responsibility attribution. The top part of Figure 2 shows the path coefficients from Study 2 that correspond with the nonmediational model tested in Study 1. The alternative models that accounted equally well for the data were different for judgments relating to the self and judgments relating to the partner. For self-related judgments, the simple nonmediational model (i.e., Model A) did not differ from the mediational model (i.e., Model B),  $L(3) = .02, p > .10$ . Thus, the paths from causal dimensions, capacities, and responsibility criteria to blame were found again to be redundant. For partner-related judgments, a different set of results was obtained. The simple mediational model accounted for significantly less variance ( $R^2 = .42$ ) in judgments relating to the partner than did the nonmediational model,  $L(3) = 9.32, p < .05$ . This indicates that at least one of the paths, causal dimensions to blame, capacities to blame, or responsibility criteria to blame, is not redundant. The simplest model that does not differ from the nonmediational model is one that specifies a direct path between responsibility criteria and blame,  $L(2) = .06, p > .10$  (see Model C in Figure 2). This means that responsibility judgments do not mediate the relation between responsibility criteria and blame. Instead, responsibility criteria directly determine blame. When MAT scores and BDI scores were entered first in hierarchical regression equations to obtain the path coefficients, the findings were not altered.

An additional component of the revised model concerned the perceived intent of the conflict-related behavior. The importance of this component is emphasized by the fact that intent was positively related to partner blame when the partner was the causal locus,  $r(68) = .48, p < .05$ , and positively related to efficacy when the self was identified as the causal locus,  $r(68) = .45, p < .01$ . Recall that both predictions were made for the voluntariness criterion in Doherty's (1978) model, but only the latter was found to be significant in the present study. These findings therefore support the usefulness of the distinction drawn between voluntariness and intentionality. Finally, the predicted relation between the partner's capacities and seeing the partner as an object of change efforts was again confirmed,  $r(68) = .61, p < .01$ .

As regards efficacy expectations, the data again point to the importance of efficacy expectations relating to the individual and not just those relating to the dyad. Table 3 shows that the pattern of coefficients for the perceived efficacy of the dyad was again similar to those obtained for efficacy expectations relating to the self. A second issue raised regarding efficacy expectations concerned their status as a mediating variable between causal attributions and self-reported conflict behavior. The data are consistent with Doherty's (1978, 1981b) model in that helplessness was significantly related to perceiving the self as the cause of the conflict,  $r(68) = -.40, p < .01$ ; seeing the cause of the conflict as global,  $r(68) = .24, p < .05$ ; and seeing the cause as stable,  $r(68) = .28, p < .05$ . When efficacy expectations were partialled out of the correlations, these results were not altered. They thus support Doherty's (1978) contention that causal attribution dimensions are directly related to reports of conflict behavior. However, this support applied only to helplessness, as none of the causal attribution dimensions was related to persistent conflict-resolution efforts. In sum, these findings provide

some support for Doherty's (1978, 1981a) model because both attribution dimensions and efficacy expectations were related to conflict dimensions.

Interestingly, the results pertaining to efficacy were stronger when perceptions of partner behavior were considered. Thus, efficacy was significantly correlated with partner persistence in problem solving,  $r(68) = .48, p < .01$ , and inversely related to helplessness,  $r(68) = -.34, p < .01$ . This suggests that efficacy may be important in how spouses view the behavior of others independent of whether it influences their own behavior. In fact, the model may provide a starting point for investigating lay theories of conflict-related behavior in others. In this regard it is noteworthy that partner persistence and helplessness were more highly correlated than were the same judgments for self-behavior,  $r(68) = -.61, p < .01$ , a finding that suggests again that the model may reflect lay theories.

A final issue investigated concerned Fincham, Beach, and Baucom's (1987) finding that the discrepancy between self-blame and partner blame is inversely related to marital satisfaction. This finding was replicated. When partner blame was subtracted from blame assigned to the self, this discrepancy was significantly related to marital satisfaction,  $r(68) = -.42, p < .01$ .

## General Discussion

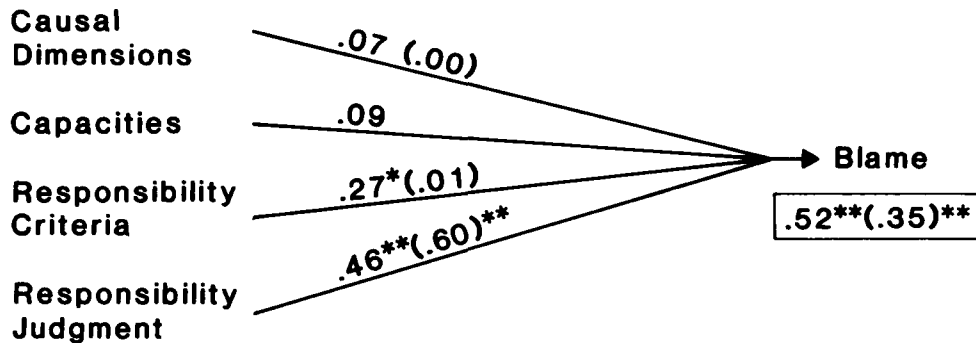
### Original Model

The results of these studies differ in their support for Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) model of cognitive processes for conflict in close relationships. As expected, this model fared poorly in regard to the mother-child relationship but received stronger support when applied to the husband-wife relationship. One factor that may account in part for this difference is the restricted distribution of mothers' responses to some of the items, especially those regarding efficacy expectations and helplessness responses. This distribution of responses is not surprising, as the parental role involves socialization of the child (including the modeling and explicit teaching of conflict resolution skills), a task that, as any parent knows, requires persistence. In this regard it is noteworthy that ratings of the self and the other as helpless were strongly related in both studies, but the direction of the relation differed. For the mother-child dyad, the relation was a negative one, whereas for the marital dyad it was a positive one.<sup>9</sup> The negative correlation reflects a lack of helplessness on the part of mothers even when the child gives up trying to resolve conflict. This is consistent with the parental role. In contrast, a strong positive relation was found between own and partner helplessness for spouses. This finding is likely to be a function of the equivalent status of the participants in the relationship. The limited variability in Study 1 may have also resulted in the lowered proportion of variance accounted for in blame judgments. It is possible that in special populations (e.g., families with hyperactive or aggressive children; highly distressed families) greater support will be found for the model in the mother-child dyad because of greater variation in responses.

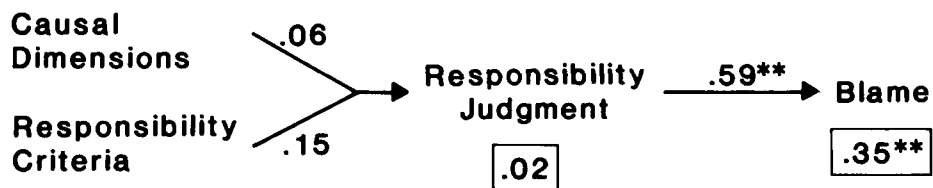
The findings of Study 1 suggest that role responsibility may be

<sup>9</sup> The correlation coefficients for the mother-child and marital dyads were  $r(56) = -.49, p < .01$ , and  $r(68) = .64, p < .01$ , respectively.

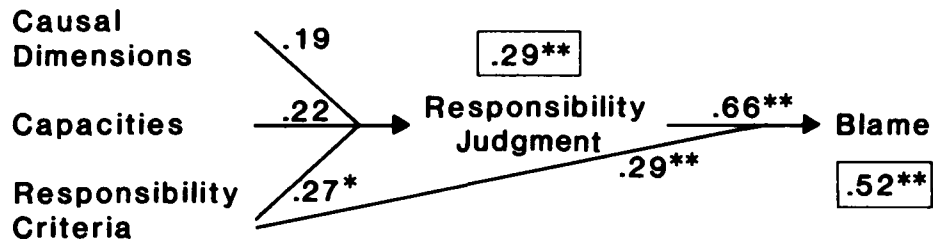
**(a) Original Model**



**(b) Revised Model for Self**



**(c) Revised Model for Partner**



**Note:** Numbers in boxes are  $R^2$  values; all other numbers are path coefficients.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

Figure 2. Path models relating to judgments for the other and self (in parentheses) in the husband-wife relationship.

an overriding consideration in hierarchically ordered relationships (Hamilton, 1978). Role responsibility would therefore need to be incorporated into any cognitive model of family conflict. A second dimension that also needs to be considered in such a model is the cognitive development of the participants in the relationship. First and most obvious, the cognitive development of the perceiver whose cognitive processes are being considered needs to be taken into account. Second, the cognitive development of the person whose behavior is the object of the cognitive processes is also im-

portant in that adults' beliefs about children and their development vary as a function of the age of the child (e.g., Dix & Grusec, 1985). These considerations suggest that a single model of cognitive processes in family conflict is likely to be extremely complex. It is perhaps more realistic to posit several models defined in terms of the nature of the relationship (hierarchical vs. lateral) and its participants (adult vs. child). In any event, it is clear that Doherty accorded his model far greater applicability than is warranted by our data.

Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) model does, however, appear to be useful for understanding conflict in marriage. This is especially apparent with respect to the relations hypothesized for the causal attribution dimensions. Thus, why the conflict is seen to occur is likely to be an important determinant of one's response to the conflict, as numerous significant relations were found between the attribution and conflict dimensions. However, it must be emphasized that our data are correlational and therefore do not provide definitive evidence that attributions are indeed causally related to conflict dimensions in the manner outlined in Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) model.

The evidence obtained for the second major component of the model, efficacy expectations, was less compelling, as efficacy was related only to helpless responses and not persistence. Moreover, the magnitude of the correlation with helpless responses was low. These results are perhaps best understood in terms of the level at which Doherty (1978) analyzed efficacy. In contrast to the attribution dimensions, efficacy expectations are presented in less detail, and the construct is seen as static and unidimensional. But as Bandura (1977, p. 85) pointed out, a "meaningful expectancy analysis" needs to incorporate the magnitude, generality, and strength of efficacy expectations. These components were neither mentioned by Doherty nor assessed in our studies. In light of these circumstances, the fact that any evidence was obtained to support the efficacy component of the model is noteworthy and suggests that Doherty (1978, 1981b) may well have been correct in identifying this construct as one that is potentially important in conflict between intimates. However, its assessment as a dynamic, multidimensional construct is necessary to determine its precise role in marital conflict and points to the need for further research on this topic.

Finally, it should be noted that Doherty's (1978) model was tested in terms of generalized attributions and efficacy expectations. That is, judgments were obtained for conflict in general rather than for a number of specific conflicts. Thus it is possible that responses reflect individual differences in attributional style and global efficacy expectations. Presumably, these generalized responses influence judgments for specific conflicts. This is, however, an empirical question that can be answered only by the collection of requisite data. Although it is unlikely that a different pattern of results will be obtained when specific conflicts are examined, this possibility cannot yet be ruled out.

### *Revised Model*

Several revisions to both components of Doherty's (1978, 1981a, 1981b) original model were proposed. Those pertaining to the attribution dimensions arose largely from recognition of the distinction between causality and responsibility. This led to (a) a reconceptualization of the attribution dimensions in the original model, (b) the introduction of responsibility criteria, (c) the assessment of capacities relevant to assigning responsibility for conflict-related behavior, and (d) the assessment of responsibility for the conflict. In addition, a model was proposed that specified the relation between the various categories of judgments. The data were consistent with this model in that responsibility judgments appeared to mediate the relation between causal attribution dimensions, responsibility criteria, and capacities and blame. Indeed, the path linking responsibility

to blame was the one for which the largest path coefficients were obtained.

Several aspects of these results are noteworthy. First, the data demonstrate that the entailment model (i.e., causal judgments to responsibility judgments to blame judgments), found in basic research using vignettes that describe the acts of hypothetical others, also applies to judgments made in the context of close relationships. This provides the first evidence to support the external validity of the entailment model. Second, the elaboration of the entailment model to include responsibility criteria may require some modification to the mediational relations it posits. This is because an additional direct path between responsibility criteria and blame was needed in Study 2. Thus, the intentional nature of conflict-related behavior, its motivation, and its voluntariness are important in regard to both responsibility and blame judgments. It therefore would be more accurate to consider these aspects of behavior as reflecting evaluative rather than responsibility criteria per se. Third, a greater proportion of the variance in responsibility and blame judgments was explained when these judgments pertained to the other person rather than to the self. In Study 2, the models for self and other were also found to differ. These findings, like those obtained in regard to the original model, once again suggest that factors that may affect self-judgments (e.g., self-esteem maintenance) need to be incorporated into the model. Finally, out of a large set of possible models, only two path models of theoretical interest were examined. Although the results are consistent with the postulated entailment model, they do not rule out two other possible path models (i.e., a model in which causation flows in the reverse direction and a model in which responsibility judgments cause, on the one hand, causal attributions, capacity judgments, and responsibility criteria and, on the other hand, blame).

Also, the categories of judgments used to predict responsibility differed in their relative usefulness. Perhaps not surprisingly, the responsibility criteria were most consistent in predicting responsibility. In addition, the path coefficient for the link between causal dimensions and responsibility was also significant in Study 1 and approached significance in Study 2. Whether the category of capacities should be retained in the revised model may be open to question, as the relevant path coefficients were only marginally significant in both studies. However, the fact that this variable was strongly related to focus of change efforts, as predicted, argues for its retention. It is also possible that the capacities assessed are not the only or the most relevant ones for determining possible responsibility for conflict-related behavior. For example, the ability to control conflict-related behavior, which was not assessed, may be equally important.

Evaluating the revisions suggested in regard to the second component of the model, efficacy expectations, is less straightforward. This is due partly to the weak results obtained and partly to the fact that some of the revisions involved the conceptualization of the construct and were therefore not empirical issues. Nonetheless, in retrospect, it is not clear that the revisions address adequately the theoretical status of efficacy as a construct and how it is to be measured. This reflects uncertainty regarding Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. There is some concern about the conceptual status of this construct and whether it can be differentiated from outcome expectations as

proposed by Bandura (see Bandura, 1984; Eastman & Marzillier, 1984; Teasdale, 1978).

This concern is particularly relevant in the present context, as our assessment of the ability to do "that which is necessary to resolve the conflict" can be interpreted as including outcome expectations. Analysis of the ability to perform specific interactional behaviors (e.g., listen carefully while your spouse presents his or her viewpoint) and the likelihood of these behaviors' leading to conflict resolution would be necessary from this perspective. However, as Bandura (1984, p. 235) noted, "Efficacy is not a discrete act, it is the exercise of control." Considered from this viewpoint, conflict resolution itself might be considered the ability for which efficacy judgments are made, and thus the impact of conflict resolution (e.g., on the relationship) would comprise the outcome.

The significance of this difference in the level at which efficacy and outcome expectations are construed is not yet known, and therefore it behooves future researchers to specify clearly the referent of these terms. In any event, if self-efficacy theory is to constitute part of a model of cognitive processes for conflict in close relationships, attention needs to be paid to the distinction between efficacy and outcome expectations, an issue that has thus far been ignored.

A further question arises concerning the adequacy of simply using self-efficacy theory to predict what partners will do once they have inferred the cause of conflict in a close relationship. Briefly stated, the problem as we see it is that self-efficacy theory deals with "people's judgments of their capabilities to execute given levels of performance" (Bandura, 1984, p. 232). Behavior in close relationships, however, is less concerned simply with levels of performance than with issues such as affective exchange, collaboration, and commitment. Thus, while self-efficacy theory may be suited to explaining an individual's behavior in contexts where skilled performance is an issue (e.g., athletic prowess; Barling & Abel, 1983) or where anxiety impairs functioning (e.g., phobias; Bandura, Adams, & Beyer, 1977), it may not be sufficient to explain what happens in close relationships. As our findings suggest, people do not necessarily conceptualize behavior in terms of capacities or skills in this context. Helplessness responses and persistence in problem solving most likely reflect both the interaction of efficacy expectations and motivation to engage in conflict-resolution behaviors. Such motivation is likely to reflect factors such as commitment to the relationship, negative affect regarding the partner, and so on. By crossing the dimensions of efficacy and motivation, it is possible to produce a typology that is relevant not only to the prediction of conflict-related behavior but also to its accompanying affect. For example, low efficacy combined with high motivation may result in conflict-related behavior that is accompanied by frustration and negative affect. However, when motivation is low, the passivity associated with learned helplessness may occur along with depressed affect.

In sum, it would be premature to reject the potential importance of efficacy expectations in a model of cognitive processes for conflict between intimates despite the limited results obtained in these studies. Further conceptual analysis of the sort outlined here is needed to guide the operational definition of this construct. We also believe that the role of motivation, implicit in Doherty's (1978) interpretation of efficacy, requires further specification.

## Conclusions

These studies provide initial data on the usefulness of an attribution-efficacy model of cognitive processes for conflict in close relationships. They point to some limitations regarding the applicability of the model across relationships yet also suggest that it provides a useful initial framework within which to examine cognitive processes in this context. It is clear that the model is uneven in that its attributional component is far more developed, at both a conceptual level and in terms of supporting data, than the component relating to efficacy expectations. Some suggestions were therefore offered to strengthen this latter component of the model. Finally, these studies do not investigate observed conflict behavior but rather self-reports of this behavior. To this extent they are limited, and observational research is also needed to evaluate fully the proposed model of cognitive processes in close relationships. These studies provide initial justification for this more costly research, the importance of which is emphasized by the need to understand more fully the escalation of conflict that may result in violence between family members.

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