

Attributional Complexity: A Required Constituent for Social Competence among Students

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Article History: Received: 12 Oct, 2018 Accepted: 3 Dec, 2018	ABSTRACT This article accosts the findings of a study conducted on identifying the role of attributional complexity in determining the social competence among students. A sample of 188 students with age of 12 to 14 years (mean age of 13.45, SD = .773) from public schools of Multan Pakistan was contacted through convenience sampling technique. To measure study variables, Attributional Complexity Scale and Social Competence Scale were administered to the participants. Employing correlation, regression analysis, and t-test, findings showed a positive significant correlation between attributional complexity and social competence. Students who were high in attributional complexity were found more socially competent as compared to those having low score on attributional complexity scale. Regression analysis further shows that seven components of attributional complexity are significantly contributing in the prediction of social competence except motivation component and abstract vs. casual. On the basis of these findings, it is underlined that students' attributional styles should be considered in the explanation and understanding of their social interactions and adjustment. Key Words: Attributional Complexity, Social competence, Social Adjustment, Social Judgement
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1. Introduction

Attributional complexity is a psychological concept that explains the degree to which one is interested in understanding the causes of behavior of other individuals and looks at various potential causes (Fletcher, Danilovics, Fernandez, Peterson, & Reeder). The individuals who have high attributional complexity are conceptually considered as “like good social psychologists” in a sense that they are highly prone to believe in dispositional factors, situational factors, and factors emerged from the past (Fletcher et al.). On the other hand, the individuals who are low in attributional complexity are

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considered as to be less likely to imagine and conceive about the causes of behavior or to understand several explanations. Many studies have postulated that attributional complex individuals are relatively less likely to think for multiple errors of social judgment and in some cases attain greater accuracy, that may provide keen perceptiveness into the psychological basis of good social judgment (Fletcher, Reeder, & Bull, Follett & Hess, Stalder & Baron).

However, the previous research is inadequate to understand how attributional complex individuals behave and how others view them in their social world. Speaking on this gap in the literature is crucial for three reasons. First, attributional complexity would seem to take part an important role in social interactions because it requires a particular interest in understanding the behavior of others. Looking into the behavior and reputation may extend insight into how attributional complexity affects individual's position in his/her social world. Second, many reviewers in the recent past have found that personality and social psychology, usually depend on self-report measures, seldom directly observes the social behaviors related with significant constructs (Baumeister & Vohs; Funder). Third, observing one's behavior and collecting judgments formed by those who acknowledge that people considerably are important because people do not always behave what they say they behave (Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins) and reputations have social consequences that matter (Hofstee; Hogan).

Social competence is defined as social, emotional, and cognitive skills and behaviors that children demand for successful social adjustment. Regardless of this simple definition, social competence is a subtle and difficult construct because the skills and behaviors involved in healthy social development vary across the different age cycles of the child and with the requirement of specific situations. A child who is socially competent would behave in a very different way as compared to a socially competent adolescent; conversely, the same behaviors (e.g., aggression, shyness) have different

implications for social adaptation depending upon the age of the child and the particulars of the social context.

Furthermore, research into the relationship of attributional complexity with other self-reported personality domains have presented a blended picture of the attributional complex. Some findings report that attributional complex individuals may possess a positive reputation and would act in a socially skilled way, while other findings report that they may be socially isolated and inapt, sticky, and awkward. Therefore, in short, this research has wider implications for social competence research. Since attributional complexity seems to be connected with better social interaction and social initiative behaviors, understanding and cognition of the behaviors of social interaction and initiatives correlates may propose what behaviors are correlated with attributional complexity, and knowledge of the attributional complexity correlates might furnish some insight of its social aftermaths in terms of social competence (Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal).

Since the early 1940s, social psychologists have been found concerned for how lay social observers define whether the causes of another individual's behavior are internal, external, or a combination of the two (Jones & Davis; Kelley). Various perspectives about attributional process have established, and they usually classified into one of two categories. One perspective suggests that people are cognitive hoarders and depend upon simple heuristics when ascribing and attributing the causes of behavior of others (Tversky & Kahneman), while the other perspective proposes that the attributional process is complex and that people form and conceive various causes (Ross & Fletcher). In addition, there is empirical prove to affirm both perspectives (Fletcher; Read). Fletcher et al. (1986) developed the Attributional Complexity Scale (ACS) to reconcile these contrasting views. Despite this categorically argument that all individuals are attributional simple or all are complex, the ACS was developed to measure the possibility

that people may differ in the extent to which their attributions are more or less advanced. In other words, “some people are simpletons and others are experts” (Fletcher et al.).

For the account that attributional complexity appears to greatly determine how an individual considers and perceives about his/her social world, it is suitable to search to explore more pertaining to the social competence and behavior of the attributional complex. Directly observing what attributional complex individuals behave is significant because it might present some understanding into how they interact with others, and why they likely to have better social judgment. Although it is proposed that they have better social interaction because they think profoundly and intricately about social information, it may also be that they act in manners that alleviate better prosocial orientation. For instance, attributional complex people might call for more questions and collect more information about their social worlds (Baumeister & Vohs; Funder).

Very limited literature is available on possible social outcomes of attributional complexity, and the views that others have of an individual may be one such consequence. Social competence is valued because it influences the chances an individual is given and it affects the way a person is dealt by people around him/her (Hofstee; Hogan). For instance, if a person is viewed as affectionate and insightful, then the people around him/her will tend to look at interactions with and befriend that person. In opposed to, potential peers will likely to be away from and dislike a person who is cold and inconsiderate. Moreover, there is evidence to propose that other’s point of views have a causal influence on behavior (Rosenthal & Rubin); an individual who is expected to be cold and inconsiderate may be more likely to behave that way. Analyzing social competence might facilitate insight regarding the social consequences of attributional complexity.

Predicting the social competence and behaviors of the attributional complex is difficult because the theory focuses on cognitive aspects of the construct rather than

behavior or personality characteristics. Moreover, two rather opposing views can be imagined. One might hypothesize that they would have a favorable social competence and be viewed as having personality characteristics associated with interpersonal effectiveness (e.g. warmth and compassion) because they have good understanding of human behavior. The attributional complex may behave in an empathic and socially skilled manner because they are motivated and able to read the cues others display and act accordingly. On the other hand, one can also imagine that the attributional complex might come off as socially detached, awkward, and vulnerable. Others may be aware that the attributional complex dedicate much energy to scrutinizing the causes of their behavior and this could be perceived as anxiety, social detachment, or even obsessiveness.

Taken together, presently available literature does not draw an absolute picture of the attributional complex individual. Research on correlating self-reports of several personality characteristics present indirect support for two contrasting views. Furthermore, very little can be said about how people higher and lower in attributional complexity behave socially—a comment that also applies to many other constructs in the psychological literature—and therefore purpose of the present study was to address this gap in knowledge. The current study was planned to examine the attributional complexity as a significant factor in determining the social competence among students. We hypothesize that because attributional complexity and its dimensions are theorized to be a specific social orientation, it will be positively correlated with social competency. We further predict that because higher levels of attributional complexity are theorized to be related to deeper thought and greater accuracy in social judgment, thus attributional complex will be higher in social competence as compare to attributional simpler individuals

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

Participants were 188 students with age of 12 to 14 years (mean age of 13.45, SD = .773) taken from public schools of Multan Pakistan. Among them 98 were male and 90 were female students with age range of 20-24 years. Convenient sampling technique was used to approach the participants. All the participants were more or less similar with social background.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Attributional Complexity Scale (ACS)

Attributional Complexity Scale (Fletcher) is a 7-point self-reported scale, designed to measure the individual differences in attributional complexity. It consists of 7 subscales with 4 items each that measure *motivation component* (to understand the causes of behavior), *complex vs. simple* (Preference for complexity), *meta cognitions* (of thinking processes involved in attribution), *interactions with others*, *abstract vs. casual* (infer internal causes of behavior), *external causes*, and *past causes*. The response options for each item are 0 to ± 3 as ‘-3’ for strongly disagree, ‘+3’ for strongly agree, and 0 for neither agree nor disagree. To score the scale, simply sum up the responses to each of the 28 items after reverse score these items; 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 26, and 28. The scale has scoring range of minimum 28 to maximum 196, higher scores on the scale show complex attributional process and lower scores reveals simple attributional process. The test-retest reliability of the scale is found to range from 0.79 to 0.84.

2.2.2 Social Competence Scale

Social Competence Scale is a measure developed by Child Trends for the Flourishing Children Project, as part of the Flourishing Children Project. It is a 9-item questionnaire with 5 point Likert Scale; Not at all like me = 0, A little like me = 1, Somewhat like me = 2, A lot like me = 3, and Exactly like me = 4. Social Competence in adolescence is defined as a set of positive social skills necessary to get along well with others and function constructively in groups, including, a) respecting and expressing appreciation for others; b) being able to work and communicate well with others and listen to others' ideas; c) demonstrating context-appropriate behaviour that is consistent with social norms; and) using a range of skills or processes aimed at resolving conflict. The maximum score for this scale equals 36. Total scores allow for quick overviews of how individuals are doing. The scale has the reliability alpha of .079.

2.2.3 Procedure

Participants were approached through convenience sampling technique at their campus. Both the questionnaires along with a demographic variable sheet were administered to the participants of this study after obtaining consent from them. They were instructed about how to fill the questionnaires. They were also assured that the information sought from them will be kept confidential and will be used only for research purpose. Results were then analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, 17 version).

2.2.4 Results

Table 1

Descriptive Data and Correlation between the Scores of Parenting Practices And Delinquency Behavior

	M	SD	Social Competence
Attributional Complexity	142.34	14.62	.73**
Motivation Component	118.31	13.73	.42*
Complex vs. Simple	117.01	14.22	.73**
Meta Cognition	139.13	14.03	.47*
Interactions with others	133.51	13.18	.62**
Abstract vs. Casual	126.32	14.15	.44*
External Causes	135.93	15.33	.59**
Past Causes	131.14	13.57	.56**

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 1 shows the mean, SD, and correlations for the scores of attributional complexity and social competence. Results indicate that attributional complexity and its all seven dimensions are positively correlated with social competence.

Table 2

Standard Regression Model showing impact of Attributional Complexity and its Subscale on Social Competence

Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
(Constant)	6343.11	142.12		1.55	.147
Attributional Complexity	.612	.077	.721	3.63	.000**
Motivation Component	.372	.061	.275	1.09	.097
Complex vs. Simple	.587	.064	.656	2.47	.000**
Meta Cognition	.389	.085	.289	1.99	.043*
Interactions with others	.411	.073	.367	3.47	.021*
Abstract vs. Casual	.379	.068	.491	1.38	.095
External Causes	.587	.042	.448	2.73	.001**
Past Causes	.472	.072	.327	3.81	.001**

$R^2 = 0.76$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.61$, ($F(8, 185) = 14.17$, $p < 0.001$)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$,

Table 2 reveals that dependent variable of social competence is 76% explained by the independent variables of attributional complexity as indicated by the value of $R^2 = 0.61$. A significant F -value for the standard regression model ($F(8, 185) = 14.17, p < 0.001$) also depicts that model significantly explains the outcome variable. Examining the t -values from the table is also an indicative of the notion that subscales of attributional complexity are significantly contributing in the prediction of social competence except motivation component and abstract vs. casual.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations and t-value for the Scores of Complex and Simpler Attributional Students on Social Competence (N = 101, 87)

Group	M	SD	t	p
Attributional Complex Students	168.14	13.92	3.44	0.00***
Attributional Simpler Students	107.02	15.61		

$df = 398, ***p < 0.001$

Table 3 indicates that attributional complex and attributional simpler students highly significantly differ in terms of reporting level of social competence. Attributional complex individuals tend to have high level of social competence as compared to attributional simpler individuals.

3 Discussion

Attributional complexity has a certain outward aspect of contributing an important role in social competence because it calls for a particular concern in understanding the behavior of others. Analyzing or probing behavior might provide understanding into how attributional complexity determines one's enduring in his/her social world. One purpose of the present research was to explore the relationship between

attributional complexity and social competence. Findings provided the support for this assumption that attributional complexity and social competence were positively correlated with each other. The study conducted by Joireman (2004) has provided the evidence for this findings who confirmed that attributional complexity always has been found connected with social competence and social judgment of one's life. Joireman (2004) correlated attributional complexity with the empathic concern and interpersonal reactivity.

Further extending purpose of this research was to look into how attributional complexity and its sub-facets influences the social competence among students. It was hypothesized that attributional complexity with its component will affect social competence. Results indicated that social competence was found significantly regressed upon attributional complexity. These findings are in consistent with the findings of a study by Stalder and Baron (1998) who investigated the influences of attributional complexity on social competence and social interactions, and they found significant effects of attributional complexity on social competence.

The present study also reported the effects of seven aspects of attributional complexity on social competence through regression analysis. Except the motivation component and abstract vs. casual aspect, all other have been found significant contributors in directing the level of social competence. Many previous studies have supported the findings of present research. Such as Blumberg, & Silvera (1998) studied attributional complexity and cognitive development, and they explored the motivational and cognitive requirements for attribution. The present study strengthened these findings by presenting the notions that meta cognition as a vital part of attribution influences the social competence. However, present findings failed to support the role of motivational component in social competence.

One of the findings also suggested the impact of complex vs. simple aspect on social competence. This finding is in tune with the findings by Devine (1989) who also examined the attribution effect, and found significant role of confidence and attributional complexity in understanding the social interactions. Similarly, Fletcher, Rosanowski, Rhodes, and Lange (1992) examined accuracy and speed of causal processing. Their study postulated that the external causes explain the social judgment. The present study also reported the same findings that show the significant impact of external and past causes on social competence.

4 Conclusion

Attributional complex individuals are thought as “good social psychologists” because they believe in consideration of dispositional factors, situational factors, and factors operating from the past for better understanding of other behaviors. Attributional complexity in turn is theorized to be associated with the development of social competence. Present research has concluded that attributional complexity is a significant contributor in determining the social competence. Overall, thinking profoundly about social interactions, judgment, and information will be involved in engaging with others using clear, communicative, and positive behavior that might be crucial elements for interpersonal accuracy, and attributional complexity, socially skilled behavior. Shortly, interpersonal accuracy may lead to a highly well-disposed social reputation.

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