The study of comparative effect of actor-observer bias in parents-adolescents conflicts
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Abstract
Actor–observer bias means that actors attribute their acts to situation factors whereas observers attribute others' the same acts to personal factors. Since this attributed bias has been studied in other cultures, it is studied in Iranian cultures specially in parents-adolescents conflicts. This is an experimental method with judgment type used in psychosocial researches. The sample are 240 individuals (120 parents and 120 adolescents) selected through available sampling and were allocated in two groups of parent-adolescent conflicts and general group. The statistical population were parents and adolescents in Esfahan in 2009-2010 and the research measure was a type of researcher-made scenario (vignette).

Findings: Parents and adolescents with conflicts, as an observer, used personal attributions, but as an actor, they used situational attributions (P<0.05). Based on the findings, the actor–observer bias is a very important factor in parent-adolescent conflicts in the Iranian culture.

Keywords: Actor-observer bias, parents–adolescents relationships, vignette, social psychology, Iranian culture.

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Introduction:
Individuals' attribution about their behaviors and others' has been affected by motivational and irrational bias. These bias influence on their judgment. Actor-observer bias or factor-inspector effect is one of the attributed errors in which actors attribute their behaviors to situational factors but observers to permanent personal characteristics in actors. For example, if someone falls down, the evident is attributed to his/her clumsiness (internal causes) but if s/he (herself or himself) falls down, s/he says I was jostled or my shoes were not suitable (situational causes) (Jones & Nisbett, 1971).

In a research by Herzog (1994), the participants are wanted to watch a video film of a driving situation and when watching, see themselves in the driver's role (actor) or a passenger's (observer). The results showed in more accidents, those in driver's role (actor) attribute their behaviors to situational factors. In contrast, observers attribute their behaviors to internal factors. Malle (2006), in a meta analysis on 173 individuals, revealed that the asymmetry of actor-observer is exclusively seen when the actor is perceived as a person with noteworthy characteristics, when the supposed events has been clarified, when the actor-observer are intimate with each other, or when related clarification is coding with open responses. Moreover, this asymmetry is about negative events. But reverse asymmetry is about positive events. Malle et al (2007) specified that the folk conceptual theory can explain behaviors better than attributive traditional theories. Park and Cho (2006), in their first research, showed clearly the generalization of actor-observer bias in Korean people and in the second research, they explained differences in different situational perceptions for probable mechanism.

Gioia and Sims (2006) studied 24 bosses and their employers in the similar situations and showed headmasters use personal attribution for their employers and employers use situational attributions. Hennessy and Jakubowski (2007) in a complicated study of actor-observer bias and anger on drivers in a similar driving accidents revealed that this bias is observed when the anger was high.
Actor-Observer bias causes:

An experiment by Storms indicated that this action is rooted in a situation concentrated by the person. The actor is generally concentrating on the environment and past history. S/he may have special information about the factors resulted in a behavior or the feeling in which that behavior has been stimulated. On the other hand, the observer's attention is always on the actor. Thus, the observer may be unaware of historical and environmental causes of what the actor has done. In the Storms' experiment two participants had a dialogue, whereas two observers watched them. The observers were ordered to watch one of the participants. After the dialogue, both the observers and actors distinguished those behaviors, such as being intimate, talkative, angry and aggressive, are personal characteristics or situational. Observers clarified actors' behavior based on their personality features. This research also had an attractive complication. Some participants watched a videotape of the dialogue which was from the angle they watched before or from the reverse one. When the camera angle was the same as the basic film, observer-actor bias happened and when it was reverse, observer-actor bias was also reversed. One of the differences among observers and actors can be different information when explaining their behaviors and others' behaviors. When we judge about you, your related information is available and, therefore, we attribute the behavior to you but when I am judging myself, the information is related to available situation because I can not see myself and, thus, I attribute my behavior to the situation (Kanda, 2005). Actor-observer bias often leads to conflict and misunderstanding. For example, when someone is late in meeting his/her friend, s/he may clears his/her delay in traffic light which all were red, whereas his/her friend may conclude that s/he is not interested in him/her (observer). These perceptions and attributions can use in the following actions as the bases and increase conflict and challenges (Orenson, 2007). One of the domain in which this bias can lead to misunderstanding, conflict and challenges is parent--adolescent relationship. Lopez et al (2009) showed that attributive patterns of mother/father-adolescent are different in actor-observer
bias. Johnston and Lee (2005), in a research, explained that 8-10 year boys use more personal attribution about others than 5-7 year ones.

**Parent-Adolescent Relationship:** In teen years, the quality of parent-adolescent relationship is just a stable prediction of mental health (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Various changes in teen years help adolescents' self-determination. Puberty makes psychological distance between adolescents and parents. Cognitive development prepares independency. Adolescents' better ability in thinking leads to social relationship in which parents de-idealize themselves and consider them as general individuals. As a result, they do not easily accept their parents' authority as the lower ages. Adolescents' psychological and physical fast development create contrary expectation in their relationship with parents. Sometimes, the quarrel is for the time duration s/he spends. Adolescents often believe that they must do some actions earlier than their parents (Collins et al, 1995). It does not mean that parents do not accept their children' independency and potentials but they believe adolescents must acquire and do these rights and behaviors later on. Parents sometimes do not like to give their children self-determination because they might not have high freedom capacity and it is frightening. If parents and adolescents try to observe their problems from each others' view and do not impose their will on each other, then, the situation will be much more better (Dornbousch et al, 1990).

As Triandis (2004) has indicated, social and psychological data are more the production of Europe and North America, whereas more than 70% of the world population are living out of these areas, it means, they are living with the cultures which are completely different from Western cultures. Therefore, to study which events are world-wide and which ones are cultural, it must be studied in different cultures. Thus, the necessity of this research was to study this bias in Iranian cultures. Specially, the effect of this effect on parent-adolescent conflicts has been studied and there is not are researches from the past in Iran. Therefore, there is a question: "Is there any significant difference between actor-observer bias in the group with parent-adolescent conflict and a general group."
Methods
This research is experimental with the type of judgment. The population were all the parents and adolescents in Esfahan city (2009-2010). The sample were 240 people consist of 120 parents (mother or father) and 120 adolescents (13-19 years old) in two groups of parent-adolescent conflict and a general group. The sampling method was available and the group with conflict were individuals referring to counseling clinics and school counselor in Esfahan due to parent-adolescent conflict.

Measures for Information
One important point in psychosocial experiments is that the experimenter has a lot of information. A desirable condition of an experiment contains skills in two areas of science and art. Making measures was very important in this research. The measure was the researcher-made interventional scenario (vignette) used in psychosocial researches to equalize the intervention. Therefore, a supposed situation is described and the participants are wanted to judge about the situation. Thus, the participants studied a scenario. It was explained that the questionnaire was unknown and secret to study parents-adolescents relationship. Afterwards, they read a part of supposed daily familial relationship describing parent-adolescent conflicts. They are wanted to allocate themselves instead of this family member and answer the questions and judge them. The scenario had two forms. The first one was given to the parents in order to allocate themselves instead of this scenario parents. The second scenario was given to adolescents and they were wanted to set themselves instead of the scenario adolescents and then judge. There were 14 questions in each scenario, in the first 7 questions, the individual was an observer and in the second 7 questions an actor. Based on the past researches, conflicts in parents-adolescents relationship were Internet usage, chat, mode, studying rate, discipline, sleep and so on. Therefore, researcher made questions related to these areas, for example, Are the parents traditional? Are the adolescents impolite? etc. Then, when the adolescent is instead of the scenario adolescent and judge himself/herself in the first 7 questions is in
actor role and again when judges about the parents in the second 7 questions is in the observer role. When the participants selected personal attributions in the first 7 questions and situational attributions in the second 7 questions, then, actor-observer bias was approved. To study the face and content validities, this scenario was given to 4 cognitive-psychological, social and clinical specialists. Then to study the clarity and understanding of the questionnaire, it was accomplished on 20 individuals in the primary step. The statistical methods were T-one sample, independent T, multi variation regression analysis and the data was analyzed by SPSS16.

**Findings:** To test the first hypothesis in which parents and adolescents use personal attributions in observer role and use situational attribution in the actor role, T-one sample with the comparative amount of 3/5 was used. This research had 4 parts: observer parent, observer adolescent, actor parent and actor adolescent. Each participant answers 7 questions which specifies his/her attribution with “yes/no”. Therefore, the comparative amount or cut of point was 3/5 which was in the middle of the continuum. The scores higher than this, for T-one sample, were related to situational and personal attributions. The results of two groups, with conflict and general group, are in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>variable</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>standard deviation</th>
<th>freedom degree</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>group 1</td>
<td>observer parents with conflict</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4/775</td>
<td>1/3021/535</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>8/786*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observer adolescent with conflict</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4/850</td>
<td>0/805</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7/865*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>actor parents with conflict</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>6/400</td>
<td>0/864</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>32/220*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>actor parents with conflict</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>6/250</td>
<td>0/984</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28/462*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group 2</td>
<td>general observer parents</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3/575</td>
<td>2/224</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0/482*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>general observer adolescent</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4/225</td>
<td>0/8412</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2/061*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>general observer parent</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6/100</td>
<td>0/957</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19/547*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>general actor adolescent</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5/825</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15/353*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results in table 1 shows that participants (parents and adolescents) in observer role use more personal attributions and situational attributions in actor role\((p<0.05)\). It confirms actor-observer bias in the participants. In these groups, just \(T\) for the general observer parent was not significant.

To test the second hypothesis “Is there any difference between two groups of parent-adolescent with conflict and general one in the amount of actor-observer bias?”, independent \(T\) test was used and the results are in table 2.

Table 2: The results of independent \(T\) test for comparing two groups (with conflict and general one) in the amount of actor-observer bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator variable</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>standard deviation</th>
<th>freedom degree</th>
<th>(t)</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group with conflict</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>11/0875</td>
<td>1/8097</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>5/467</td>
<td>0/001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General group</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9/7000</td>
<td>1/93829</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in table 2 shows that there is a significant difference in the amount of actor-observer bias. The group with conflict used this bias more\((p<./001)\).

To study the third hypothesis about the relationship among academic level, social and economical level, gender, with actor-observer bias in parents and also the relationship among children order, social and economical level, gender, with actor-observer bias in adolescents, multi variable regression analysis was used. The results are in table 3 and 4.

Table 3: Regression analysis of academic level, social and economical level, gender, with actor-observer bias in parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variables</th>
<th>nonstandard coefficient</th>
<th>standard coefficient</th>
<th>(t)</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fixed amount</td>
<td>4/653</td>
<td>0/487</td>
<td>9/557</td>
<td>0/000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic level</td>
<td>0/70</td>
<td>0/079</td>
<td>0/074</td>
<td>0/886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social – economical level</td>
<td>0/235</td>
<td>0/125</td>
<td>0/159</td>
<td>0/877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>0/125</td>
<td>0/232</td>
<td>0/043</td>
<td>0/538</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the results in table 3, academic level, social and economical level, gender do not have any significant relationship with actor-observer bias in parents.

Table 4: Regression analysis of children order, social and economical level, gender, with actor-observer bias in adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variables</th>
<th>nonstandard coefficient</th>
<th>standard error</th>
<th>standard coefficient</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed amount</td>
<td>6/046</td>
<td>0/463</td>
<td></td>
<td>13/058</td>
<td>0/000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic level</td>
<td>-0/121</td>
<td>0/192</td>
<td>-0/087</td>
<td>-0/988</td>
<td>0/318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social – economical Level</td>
<td>0/084</td>
<td>0/125</td>
<td>0/053</td>
<td>0/670</td>
<td>0/504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0/182</td>
<td>0/244</td>
<td>-0/059</td>
<td>-0/745</td>
<td>0/457</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results in table 4, children order, social and economical level, gender do not have any significant relationship with actor-observer bias in adolescent.

Discussion and Conclusion
Concerning the serious effect of actor-observer bias on the interpersonal relationship, specially parent-adolescent relationship, the study of this bias is very important. Based on the results, parents and adolescents in the observer role use more personal attributions and situational attributions in actor role. These are consistent with Jones and Nisbett (1971), Herzog (1994), Park et al (2006), Gioia et al (2006), Hennessy et al (2007) but it is somehow congruent with Malle (2006) and Malle et al (2007).

Jones and Nisbett have presented two clarifications. First, information difference leads to attribution difference. Individuals in the actor role have considerable information about their actions in different situations and know that how their behaviors differ in these situations. Therefore, they attribute their actions to situational characteristics whereas they are not aware of behavioral history of the actor in observer role and attribute others' action to internal factors based on the attribution basic errors pattern. Second, the difference in the viewpoint leads to attribution differences. The observer naturally concentrates on the actor's action and it resulted in this point that the
observer attributes actor's behavior to his/her tendencies. The actor does not concentrate on his/her action but out of himself/herself and follows situational causes, it means, to observer's view situation is important (Azarbayejani et al. 2008). In this research, actor-observer bias in parents-adolescents is confirmed. It must be noticed that among the groups, just the difference was not significant in general observer parent. In its clarification, it can be pointed to prosocialization (open-mindedness). Also the results showed individuals with parent-adolescent conflict used more attributive bias than general group. Although this research results reveal the generalization of actor-observer bias, the results in table 3 and 4 showed this bias in parent-observer relationship with conflict is more than general people. Therefore, actor-observer bias is an important factor in parent-adolescent conflict. They are in the same line with Johnstone and Lee (2005) and Lopez et al. (2009).

When the parents have laws and regulations for their daily life, their familial conflicts are created and increased due to different viewpoint and different attributions. Rapid physical and psychological changes in teen years create opposite expectation in the parent-child relationship. Parents and adolescents are different in the age for special advantages such as control on clothes, school lessons and going out with friends (Smetana, 2002). Parents generally do not know why adolescents want to be free of familial activities and be with their peers. Because the adolescents’ peers are under the same stresses and pressures, it is supposed that they understand each other. Adolescents often accept their friends' advice and they want peace (Fuligni et al. 1993). Also, adolescents do not understand that their parents want them to be with each other because an important stage in their life, parenting, ends very soon (Berek, 2007). The analysis results showed academic level, children order, social and economical level, gender do not have any significant relationship with this bias. It shows the generality of this bias and being pervasive of cognitive errors.

Available sampling is a limitation in this research. Since counseling centers and studied schools are in different part of the city, the sample can be an introductory samples. Also, gender differences specially
attributions type has not been studied concerning adolescents' relationship with the same sex parent or opposite sex parents. It can be suggested in later researches. Our clarification about life incidents are rational and precise, thus, they are susceptible to bias and inaccuracy. Social psychologists have recognized some biases in our clarification of social world in which one is actor-observer bias. This research has clinical and practical points which are useful in the families and counseling centers.

Suggestions:
1- Because of cultural effects on this bias, it is suggested to accomplish this research and compare the results.
2- It is suggested to study children's gender with this bias.
3- It is suggested to study cognitive bias in Iranian culture.

Appreciation:
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