Liking and Attributions of Motives as Mediators of the Relationships Between Individuals’ Reputations, Helpful Behaviors, and Raters’ Reward Decisions

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Two studies investigated the mediating effects of liking and attributions of motives on the relationship between a ratee’s reputation and helpful behaviors and raters’ reward decisions. During managerial simulations, raters evaluated individuals after watching videotapes in which the individual’s reputation and helpful behaviors were manipulated. Results indicated an interaction effect between reputation and helpful behaviors such that a helpful person with a good reputation received more rewards than did a helpful person with a bad reputation. In contrast, an unhelpful person with a good reputation did not receive better rewards than an unhelpful person with a bad reputation. Moreover, raters’ liking of ratees and the motives raters attributed to ratees’ helpful behaviors mediated the relationship between the manipulations and raters’ reward decisions.

Although a great deal of research illustrates that employees’ helpful behaviors are recognized and rewarded (Allen & Rush, 1998; Eastman, 1994; Kiker & Motowidlo, 1999; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1991, 1993; Parks & Sims, 1989; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; Werner, 1994), few studies examine the factors used by raters to determine which helpful behaviors to reward. One factor that may affect raters’ evaluations of employees’ helping behaviors is the employees’ reputation, or “labels” given to them by others. It is well known that many supervisors’ evaluations are fairly quick and immediate. In various situations, supervisors use labels or “prototypes” of behaviors rather than the behaviors themselves to rate employees (Feldman, 1981). This finding has implications for helping behavior because it suggests that even if individuals enact helping behavior, the label assigned to them by their evaluator is likely to have an impact on their ratings.

A recent study offers some explanations for how the labeling process of helpful behaviors occurs. Allen and Rush (1998) found that when employees enact helpful behaviors, they are viewed by supervisors as more likable, which in turn leads to increased rewards for those employees. Using social information-processing theory, Allen and Rush argued that supervisors seek information that allows them to assign employees into categories based on the salient characteristics of those employees. Accordingly, when employees demonstrate helpfulness, supervisors are provided with cognitive cues that indicate that these employees are similar to the prototype of a good employee. In turn, supervisors assign greater rewards to those individuals they label as good employees. Thus, the Allen and Rush (1998) study illustrates how social information-processing theory provides a framework for explaining some of the processes used by supervisors in interpreting employees’ behaviors and determining when to reward helpful behaviors.

However, employees’ reputations are not created only by individuals themselves or their behaviors. Broadly defined, reputations are the attributes given to actors by others (Raub & Weesie, 1990; Wilson, 1985). The general basis of one’s reputation is one’s past behaviors as observed by others (Raub & Weesie, 1990), but even rumors can influence one’s reputation (Koller, 1992, 1995). Accordingly, individuals are not solely responsible for creating their own reputation or labels, others as well provide information that may contribute to one’s reputation. Indeed, when Tsui (1984) measured the reputation of 217 managers created by different constituencies (i.e., supervisors, subordinates, peers), she showed that these reputations were strongly related to the rewards received. Thus, although an individual’s behavior provides a clue about the type of person he or she is, others who observe or know this person can also offer information that contributes to his or her reputation. In turn, these reputations may provide raters with cues that indicate how to categorize or label the individual. Armed with this information, raters can decide whether to reward helpful behavior. Therefore, the labels assigned to individuals as created...
by their reputation should serve a role in interpreting their behaviors, whether these labels are relevant or not.

When employees have a good reputation and are helpful or when employees have a bad reputation and are unhelpful, both sources of information are congruent with what is expected. Therefore, supervisors can immediately categorize the employee as a “good employee” or a “bad employee.” Thus, we expect individuals with a good reputation and who are helpful to receive the greatest reward allocations, while individuals with a bad reputation and who are not helpful to receive the least reward allocations. However, when the information based on reputation and behaviors is contradictory, supervisors are faced with a dilemma—which information should they believe? Because the unhelpful behavior is observable and more objective and the reputation information is subjective by nature (i.e., gossip, rumor, complaints), we believe that the behavioral information should override the reputational information. Thus, we do not expect those who engage in unhelpful behaviors to be highly rewarded irrespective of their reputation. The same is not true with respect to helpful behaviors. It is well established that people’s expectations about others are moderately positive (Kanouse & Hanson, 1971) and therefore negative information about others stands out by virtue of being rare (see Fiske, 1981). Because negative cues are often more salient than positive cues (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1981; Roese, 1997; Wong & Weiner, 1981), if an employee enacts helpful actions but has a bad reputation, his or her negative reputation should stand out. Thus, ratees who enact helpful behaviors but have a bad reputation should receive significantly fewer rewards than those who enact helpful behaviors but have a good reputation. Thus, we proposed the following.

**Hypothesis 1:** Ratees’ helping behaviors would interact with their reputation to influence raters’ reward allocation decisions such that the effect of helpful (vs. unhelpful) behaviors on rewards would be stronger for ratees who have a good reputation than those with a bad reputation. In other words, reputation would have a greater effect among those who engage in helpful behaviors than those who engage in unhelpful behaviors.

Research indicates that raters use cognitive and affective processes when evaluating behavior (Cardy & Dobbins, 1994; Feldman, 1981; Krzystofiaik, Cardy, & Newman, 1988). Because information about a ratee is rarely complete, raters must perform several cognitive tasks related to how they gather, store, retrieve, and use information about the ratee when making performance evaluation decisions (Feldman, 1981). Thus, to further understand how one’s reputation may interact with one’s helpful behaviors to influence rewards, we need to explore the processes by which raters evaluate helpful behaviors. In this section, we investigate two of these processes: attributions of motives (cognitive-type process) and liking (affective-type process). Exploring these processes should help identify some of the conditions under which evaluation judgments of helpful behaviors would be especially sensitive to reputational labels.

**Attributions of Motives**

One of the main ways in which raters evaluate others’ behaviors is by constructing causal explanations for ratees’ behavior (Allen & Rush, 1998; Feldman, 1981). Thus, raters’ attributions and interpretations of the helping behaviors of ratees also may influence their decisions regarding these ratees (Ferris, King, Judge, & Kacmar, 1991). Helpful behavior may not always be viewed positively by supervisors. For example, Eastman (1994) found that people who engaged in helpful behaviors are sometimes labeled as ingratiators if they are perceived as insincere. Ingratiators receive lower rewards than those perceived as sincere in their helpful behaviors. Using attribution theory as a framework, Eastman found that performance evaluators determine whether observed helpful behaviors are consistent with what is expected from the performer of the behaviors. In turn, these consistent cues are used to label performers of helpful behaviors as either “ingratiators” or “sincere.” Later, performers are rewarded in accordance with their assigned labels.

On the basis of Eastman’s work (1994), Allen and Rush (1998) argued that one of two causal motives can be associated with helpful behaviors: altruistic motives, which are likely to positively influence performance appraisals, and instrumental motives, which are likely to negatively impact performance judgments. Indeed, these authors found that motives mediate the relationship between helpful behaviors and overall evaluations. In addition, they found that the motives of individuals who engage in helpful behaviors more often are likely to be attributed to altruistic motives whereas the motives of those who engage in helpful behaviors less often are likely to be attributed to instrumental motives.

Eastman’s (1994) and Allen and Rush’s (1998) work provide evidence that the way by which supervisors interpret helpful behaviors influences how they allocate rewards. However, in these studies, the interpretation of the behavior as ingratiatory, sincere, altruistic, or instrumental is given to employees on the basis of observed behavior. Although the labels assigned to employees by their supervisors may be partially determined by observed helpful behaviors, they are also likely to be influenced by other sources. For example, one may exhibit positive-type behaviors (i.e., being helpful, attentive) and at the same time have a reputation of being deceitful or nasty. This reputation may have been created by past critical incidents that are no longer relevant, by jealous peers, or by simple unbiased rumors. Thus, raters may attribute altruistic or instrumental motives to observed helpful behavior not only on the basis of the behavior itself, but also on the ratee’s reputation. In turn, these attributions of motives should influence raters’ decision making, such as reward allocations.

**Hypothesis 2:** The relationship between ratees’ helpful behaviors and reputations with raters’ reward allocation decisions would be mediated by attributions of motives.

**Affect and Liking**

Although most investigations of performance evaluations involve only cognitive components (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995), empirical evidence suggests that raters have strong feelings toward their rates, and these feelings have an impact on raters’ evaluations of them (see Cardy & Dobbins, 1994). Thus, to accurately identify raters’ decision-making processes, both cognitive and affective components need to be assessed. In addition, a large body of research suggests that affect and cognition cannot be easily separated. For example, Isen and her colleagues (Isen, Johnson,
Mertz, & Robinson, 1985; Isen, Niedenthal, & Cantor, 1992; Isen, Shalkler, Clark, & Karp, 1978) showed that positive affect cues positive material in memory, influences the way material is organized in one's mind, and influences the complexity and flexibility of material recalled. These findings have several implications for raters' evaluations and decision making. First, if positive affect cues more positive material in memory, raters that feel positive affect toward ratees should recall more positive instances of behaviors. Second, people in positive moods categorize material in more complex, rich, and flexible ways than those in neutral or negative moods (see Isen, 1987). In turn, raters who like their ratees may judge their behaviors in more sophisticated ways. For example, instances of inadequate performance may be attributed to the complexity of the performance situation and not necessarily to the individual. Third, people in positive affect conditions creatively see more connections, even among seemingly unrelated concepts (Isen et al., 1985). Thus, raters who like their ratees may see more links between ratees' behaviors and successful performance even if those are just remotely connected. In turn, these affective and cognitive processes may lead to more positive evaluations of ratees.

In fact, research generally supports the impact of affect on performance evaluations. According to Cardy and Dobbins (1986), affect in performance evaluations mainly takes the form of liking. These authors argued that liking is an integral part of the performance evaluation process. Indeed, they and others showed that when supervisors like their employees, they rate their employees more favorably, allocate to them more rewards, and are less likely to discipline those employees (Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Dobbins & Russell, 1986; Fandt, Labig, & Urich, 1990; Judge & Ferris, 1993; Tsui & Barry, 1986). These findings have also been extended to helpful-type work behaviors. Allen and Rush (1998) suggested that liking is enhanced when employees engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and found that when employees engage in OCBs, they are liked more by supervisors. In turn, likability mediates the relationship between the helpful behaviors and performance evaluations as well as reward recommendations. We believe that reputation should also influence the likability and positive affect of the rater toward the ratee. If an employee has a good reputation, it is likely the ratee is known for doing good things for the company, other employees, customers, and even the supervisor. This “good” reputation should produce a positive affective response from the supervisor. Thus, the relationship between helpfulness and reputation with reward allocation decisions should be mediated by affect and liking.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between ratees’ helpful behaviors and reputation with raters’ reward allocation decisions would be mediated by liking.

Overview

The results of two studies investigating the effects of the interaction between reputation and helpful behavior on reward allocation are presented in this article. The first study explores this interaction effect, using a managerial simulation. The second study replicates the results of Study 1 and also explores the process variables that mediate the relationship between reputation, helpful behaviors, their interactions, and reward allocation.
Jon. In this version, Jon indicated that Bill Jensen seemed like a nice guy and that Leslie "finally found a good person for that job." Also, in the good reputation condition, the in-basket materials contained a memo from the subordinate, Ron Kenyon, asking Leslie Wilder to move his office next to Bill Jensen’s because Bill seemed fun to work with and to be a "genuine person." Thus, Jensen’s reputation was manipulated with both the answering machine message and the confidential letter. The combination of these two reputation items was expected to add strength to the manipulation of reputation.

Measures. Reward decisions were measured with nine items adopted from Kiker and Motowidlo (1999). Participants made several reward decisions on a 7-point anchored scale (e.g., promotion suitability) ranging from 1 (totally unsuitable) to 7 (extremely suitable), as to how much of a pay increase to give Bill Jensen, whether to promote him, and whether to recommend him for a fast-track development program (α = .98). The measure for perceived helpfulness was adopted from Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996). Responses to the seven items were based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all sincere) to 7 (very sincere).

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the study variables. To determine whether our experimental manipulations created the intended conditions of the study, we conducted one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA). The results indicated that the manipulation of helpfulness significantly influenced participants’ ratings of perceived helpfulness (Mhelpful = 5.38, SDhelpful = 1.01; Munhelpful = 1.56, SDunhelpful = 0.54), F(1, 95) = 563.73, p < .01, η² = .86, and the reputation manipulation influenced perceived reputation, though much less strongly (Mgood reputation = 3.62, SDgood reputation = 1.77; Mbad reputation = 2.91, SDbad reputation = 1.86), F(1, 104) = 3.89, p < .05, η² = .04). Thus, results confirmed the expected manipulation effects.

To test the hypothesis that manipulated helping behavior interacts with manipulated reputation to influence reward allocations, we conducted a two-way ANOVA. The overall reward score was the dependent variable. Results suggested a significant main effect of manipulated helpfulness, F(1, 99) = 166.83, p < .01, η² = .63. The ANOVA results also suggested a main effect of manipulated reputation, F(1, 99) = 7.58, p < .01, η² = .07, on reward allocations. Results of the ANOVA showed a significant interaction effect, F(1, 99) = 5.95, p < .05, η² = .06, supporting our first hypothesis. The pattern of the means in Table 2 suggested that the effect of engaging in helpful behaviors on reward allocations was stronger when Bill Jensen had a good reputation than when he had a bad reputation. However, as hypothesized, there were no significant differences between unhelpful behavior accompanied by a bad reputation and unhelpful behavior accompanied by a good reputation. In addition, helpful behavior accompanied by a bad reputation was rewarded more than unhelpful behavior accompanied by a good or a bad reputation.

One curious finding was that although the correlation between manipulated reputation and rewards was .10 (ns), the ANOVA results showed a significant main effect of manipulated reputation on rewards (η² = .07). We investigated whether this discrepancy was due to suppressor effects. Indeed, a one-way ANOVA of manipulated reputation on rewards revealed an eta-squared result of .01; but when manipulated helpfulness was added to the ANOVA, eta-squared increased to .07. Hierarchical regression showed similar findings. The β-coefficient of manipulated reputation increased from .10 to .15 when helpfulness was entered into the regression. Thus, it seemed that manipulated helpfulness had a suppressing effect on the relationship between manipulated reputation and rewards.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to specifically investigate two of the underlying cognitive and affective processes used by raters in the evaluative process: attribution of motives and affect and liking.

Method

Participants and procedure. Undergraduates enrolled in several required management courses at a mid-sized southeastern university were asked to participate in an in-basket, managerial decision-making study. Participation was voluntary, and students were given extra credit for their participation. Two hundred seven students with a mean age of 22, of which 45.3% were women, participated. The managerial simulation, in-basket simulation, and experimental conditions for Study 2 were identical to those used in Study 1 with two exceptions. First, lab sessions were held over a 3-week period (rather than 1 week), and second, additional questionnaire items were included in the survey completed by participants.

Measures. Reward decisions were measured by the same items used in Study 1 (α = .97). Perceived helpfulness was measured by the same items used in Study 1 (α = .97). Perceived reputation was measured by asking participants to rate Bill Jensen on 11 characteristics (egotistical, self-conceited, self-centered, cunning, deceptive, deceitful, selfish, scheming, sly, insincere, phony), using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (definitely not)
Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Superscripts indicate which variables were controlled for. Cronbach’s alphas are in parentheses along the diagonal. * \(p < .01\), ** \(p < .05\). The pattern of the means in Table 4 suggested a replication of the results of Study 1. However, the suppression effect of manipulated helpfulness on the relationship between manipulated reputation and rewards that was found in Study 1 was not replicated in Study 2. One other significant difference between Study 1 and Study 2 was the size of the correlations between the manipulations and rewards. In Study 1, the correlation between reputation and rewards (.10, \(ns\)) was significantly lower than this relationship (.31, \(p < .05\)) in Study 2. In contrast, in Study 1, the correlation between helpfulness and rewards (.79, \(p < .01\)) was significantly higher than this relationship (.61, \(p < .01\)) in Study 2. These differences may be due to an unidentified study-level moderator. Nonetheless, despite these differences, the main results of Study 1 were fully replicated in Study 2.

Before specifically testing Hypotheses 2 and 3, we conducted a series of hierarchical regressions (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) that analyzed the process variables of liking and attributions of motives together, as mediators of the relationship between the manipulations and reward allocation. As shown in Table 5, we first regressed reward allocation on the manipulations (helpful behavior and reputation) and the interaction between them. Together, these variables accounted for 49% of the variance in reward allocation. We then regressed reward allocation on the manipulations and their interaction after controlling for the process variables. As shown in Table 5 (Regression 1), the effects of the reputation manipulation and the interaction dropped to an insignificant level. Although the effects of helpfulness remained statistically significant in predicting reward allocation, it dropped by 53% after controlling for the processes. The amount of variance explained by the manipulations and the interaction variables dropped from 49% to 5%. Overall, we found that the processes partially mediated the effects of helpful behavior and fully mediated the effects of reputation and the interaction.

To test Hypotheses 2 and 3 specifically to see whether each type of process mediated these relationships, we tested the mediation effect of each process, separately, on the relationships between the manipulations and reward allocation. The effects of the interaction,
controlling for liking (Table 5, Regression 2) and attributions (Table 5, Regression 3) dropped to insignificant levels in all cases. Although the effects of the two manipulations did not drop to an insignificant level, all the effect sizes dropped significantly, and the variance dropped from 49% to 6% for liking and 11% for attributions. In a series of different regressions, we also found that the variance dropped from 49% to 6% for liking and 11% for attributions: \( R^2 = .03, p < .01 \), and attributions: \( R^2 = .03, p < .01 \). Thus, overall, the processes at least partially mediated the relationship between the manipulations and reward allocation and explained part of the variance in reward allocation.

Discussion

The results of our two studies supported our first hypothesis that reputations interacted with helpful behaviors to influence reward allocations. Similar to Eastman’s (1994) results, whereby people perceived as less sincere were given fewer rewards than those seen as more sincere, we found that individuals with a bad reputation received fewer rewards than individuals with a good reputation. However, our findings extend Eastman’s work in that we illustrated that rumors and reputation contributed to how individuals were labeled. Clearly, our results suggest that helping behaviors are not judged in a vacuum but rather they are sensitive to reputational labeling. In this study, we found that when the ratee was unhelpful, his or her good reputation did not help, but when the ratee was helpful, his or her bad reputation was a disadvantage. However, we also found that when the ratee had a bad reputation, his or her helpful behavior did contribute to their rewards, and in fact, he or she received more rewards than when he or she was unhelpful and had a good reputation. One potential explanation for this result is that the behavioral cues provided by the helpful behavior were much stronger than the purely informational cues provided by the reputation manipulation. The reputation information was subjective by nature (i.e., gossip, rumor, complaints), while the helpful behavior was observable and more objective. Nonetheless, it may also be that helpfulness can, in general, override bad reputations. If this is true, then employees with a bad reputation can engage in helpful behaviors to mitigate the impact of their reputation. Future research needs to explore this possibility as a potential factor in supervisory decisions.

Our second set of hypotheses that attribution of motives and liking mediated the relationship between the manipulations and reward allocation decisions was also largely supported. These results fit into a growing body of research indicating that affect and liking of the rater toward the ratee is a strong influencing factor in the rater decision-making process. This has been consistently demonstrated in past research with regard to performance-relevant information (Allen & Rush, 1998; Cardy & Dobbins, 1994); however, our study showed that performance-irrelevant information such as reputation also impacted liking and in turn influenced raters’ decision making. Similar to Allen and Rush, we found that attribution of altruistic motives (but not instrumental motives)

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Bad reputation</th>
<th>Good reputation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>3.91b,c,d (1.29)</td>
<td>5.04b,c,d (1.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhelpfulness</td>
<td>2.14ab (1.01)</td>
<td>2.55ab (1.19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Superscripts indicate which cells are significantly different from each other. All values are significantly different at \( p < .05 \).

* Helpfulness with a bad reputation.  b Helpfulness with a good reputation.  c Unhelpfulness with a bad reputation.  d Unhelpfulness with a good reputation.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Regression 1</th>
<th>Regression 2</th>
<th>Regression 3</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \beta )</td>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>( \beta )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful behaviors</td>
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<td>.49**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling for processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1—processes</td>
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<td>.57**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attributions of altruistic motives</td>
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<td>.50**</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attributions of instrumental motives</td>
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<td>Step 2—manipulations</td>
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<td>.31**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
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<td>Helpful behaviors</td>
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<td>.09*</td>
<td>.10*</td>
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<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
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</table>

Note. Regression 1 represents regression of rewards on all processes (liking and attributions) and manipulations (helpful behaviors, reputation, and interaction). Regression 2 represents regression of rewards on liking and manipulations. Regression 3 represents regression of rewards on attributions.

* \( p < .05 \).  ** \( p < .01 \).
partially mediated the relationship between helpfulness and reward allocation. We also found that the rater’s reputation impacted the attribution of these motives to his or her behavior, which in turn influenced their compensation.

Although the correlation matrix shows that, in all cases, the behavioral information of helpfulness impacted the mediating variables more strongly than reputation, reputation was significantly and moderately related to liking and altruistic motives. Given that it took only two critical incidents to create the reputation effect, these results seem important because they indicate that even second-hand information that created the bad reputations influenced raters’ affective responses to ratees and attributions of their motives. In turn, these mediating factors impacted raters’ decisions regarding those employees, and specifically the interpretation of their helping behaviors. Although reputation may impact the interpretation of any performancerelevant behavior, it may be especially influential with helping behaviors due to their discretionary nature. Thus, if organizations want to encourage helping behaviors through reward allocation, they need to pay attention to the biasing effect of reputations as created by others.

One possible concern is that our manipulations were so strong that they created demand characteristics.2 In other words, participants guessed how we expected them to respond to the manipulations and reacted accordingly (Schwab, 1999). Although we did not specifically investigate this in our first study, we did investigate it in the second study. First, we asked participants what they thought the purpose of the study was. None of the 207 students linked the study with reputations, helpfulness, or both. In addition, when students turned in their completed surveys, they were given a final sheet with five options and asked to circle the one that best described the purpose of the study. Only 28% of the students chose the correct option. Although one can never completely eliminate the possibility that demand characteristics influenced the results, the combined outcome of our two manipulation checks suggested that students did not know the true purpose of the experiment and thus were not likely to respond in accordance with our expectations.

This study makes several contributions in demonstrating the importance of the context of helpful behaviors in influencing raters’ decision making. Certainly, individuals’ reputations influenced raters’ perceptions of ratees’ helpful work behaviors. We consistently demonstrated this in two studies. This study also demonstrated that reputation affected the use of liking and causal attribution to the interpretation of helpful behaviors. This has important implications for organizations because the categorizations that raters form may or may not accurately portray the true behavior of the ratee. Although not a new concern for organizations, our results do raise new thoughts about how years of research on biases in performance evaluation are also applicable to the evaluation of helping behaviors.

2 We thank two anonymous reviewers for pointing out this potential problem.

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