

## Thinking About Situational Factors and the FAE (20 points)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Instructions: Circle the best answer where appropriate, and complete short-answer items as briefly as possible. Each item is worth 1 point or as noted.*

- Suppose you're at the store asking a clerk a question, and the clerk speaks abruptly to you. There are at least two possible reasons: something about the clerk's personality or something about the situation. If you are like most people, you might initially commit the fundamental attribution error and assume that:
  - the clerk is a rude person.
  - the clerk is having a stressful day.
  - you said something that accidentally offended the clerk.
  - either B or C
- Suppose you're walking down an alley in a large city and see someone sleeping who appears to be homeless. You may wonder to yourself, "Why is this person homeless?" If you were to commit the fundamental attribution error, which of the following explanations might be your answer?
  - The local economy is in bad shape, closing plants and laying off workers.
  - Maybe this person's home burned down recently, and the government has not yet acted to help.
  - Homeless people tend to be lazy or too irresponsible to hold down a job.
  - Either A or B could be your reason.
- According to lectures thus far, situational factors might help explain:
  - why some minority group members score lower than Whites on academic achievement tests
  - atrocities such as ethnic cleansing and genocide
  - reckless driving behavior
  - all of the above
- In addition to the examples above (e.g., homelessness), what are some other predicaments or instances of suffering that might be caused by situational factors as well as personality characteristics? Provide at least two examples. (2 pts)

Example #1:

Example #2:

- For each of the following items, write a number using the 7-point scale below. This is not a research survey; I mainly want you to begin thinking about the FAE in your daily life.

Not at all    1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7    A great degree

\_\_\_ To what degree are you open to the possibility that *you yourself* might sometimes commit the FAE when you explain someone's behavior?

\_\_\_ To what degree do you desire to "improve" in terms of how you explain others' behaviors?

\_\_\_ After learning about the FAE, to what degree do you feel that you can now consider possible situational factors when someone acts negatively or aggressively against you?

\_\_\_ To what degree have you thought about the FAE outside of class?

**Over →**

6. Some of you may have started thinking about the FAE outside of class. I want all of you to begin doing so for the purpose of this assignment. The following are some places to think about the FAE and about the existence of situational factors in explaining others' behaviors. Place a checkmark next to each place in which you've already thought about these issues. (Feel free to check "none" if that is accurate.)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> while driving                           | <input type="checkbox"/> while shopping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> while in other classes                  | <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> while spending time with family/friends | <input type="checkbox"/> none           |

7. Between now and the due date, pay attention to cases in which someone behaves negatively or aggressively toward you or otherwise mistreats you in some way (it can be minor or very serious). Record 5 such instances on the attached sheet. Describe the observed negative behavior against you, and then list 1 possible cause based on the personality of the "aggressor" and 2 possible situational causes. Even if the situational cause seems unlikely, if it is *possible*, go ahead and list it, but try to be realistic (e.g., if someone cuts you off on the highway, it is possible but not realistic that the driver was receiving a telepathic communication from an alien at that moment – do not list this possibility). (10 pts)

Keep in mind that explaining mistreatment is not a black-and-white issue. That is, bad behavior can be caused by a combination of personality and situational factors rather than either one alone, so if you think that another driver is reckless or stupid, that might be true, but in addition to that factor there might still be situational causes contributing to the negative outcome (e.g., a medical emergency).

Complete the items below after completing the chart on the attached page.

8. According to lecture, committing the FAE after being mistreated predicts:

- A. anger.                      B. desire to retaliate.                      C. depression.                      D. both A and B

9. Research shows that people who commit the FAE are less likely than others to help a homeless or poor person. In other words, we are less likely to help those in need if we think they are lazy or otherwise responsible for their predicament. Thus, reducing the FAE might not only reduce conflict and negative emotions (e.g., anger) but also increase helpfulness and compassion. Do you notice these effects in yourself? Answer the following items using the 7-point scale below. (2 pts)

Not at all    1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7    A great degree

\_\_\_ To what degree has knowledge of the FAE or of situational factors made you less upset or less defensive in response to someone's negative behavior toward you (as in your examples above)?

\_\_\_ To what degree has knowledge of the FAE or of situational factors made you less judgmental (i.e., less likely to judge the other person negatively)?

\_\_\_ To what degree do you think the existence of the FAE and of situational factors *should* make us less judgmental?

\_\_\_ To what degree do you think such knowledge can make you feel more compassion for those in tough predicaments?

\_\_\_ To what degree would you be willing to consider situational factors to explain terrorist attacks against Americans (in addition to or in place of the terrorists being "evil")?

\_\_\_ To what degree has this assignment made you more reflective in explaining others' negative behaviors?

10. OPTIONAL: If you want to further describe your thoughts from doing this assignment, please write a short essay about them.

Observed Behavior	1 Possible Personality Cause	1 Possible Situational Cause	2 <sup>nd</sup> Possible Situational Cause