

Social Allergens and Frustrated Interpersonal Motives

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Social Allergens

A social allergen is a repeated unpleasant behavior that produces a reaction of escalating annoyance or disgust (Cunningham, et al., 2004).

Social allergens are behaviors or features of other people that grate on your nerves (O'Connor, 2004). They can generate aversive emotional experiences and unpleasant reactions, analogous to physical allergies to substances such as cat dander or ragweed.

<http://flash.lakeheadu.ca/~bocconor/allergensmain.html>

Research Questions

1. Is it fruitful to conceptualize a social allergen as a prototype?
2. Do people differ in their individual templates for a given social allergen?
3. If two people are equally irritated by a particular allergen, are their frustrated motives necessarily the same?

Study 1: Identifying Common Social Allergens

Participants:

15 adult students in a Continuing Studies Personality Course.

Procedure:

Students were asked to rate how annoying they found each of 11 social allergens: 1 = not at all; 7 = very annoying

Sample allergens:

H is always telling me what to do: he is arrogant, and acts superior.

P follows me everywhere, clings to me like a child; I have to take care of her.

An Illustrative Case

Allergen H:

“H is always telling me what to do. He is arrogant and acts superior.”

Five participants rated this allergen 6 or higher.

All included it among their 3 strongest irritants.

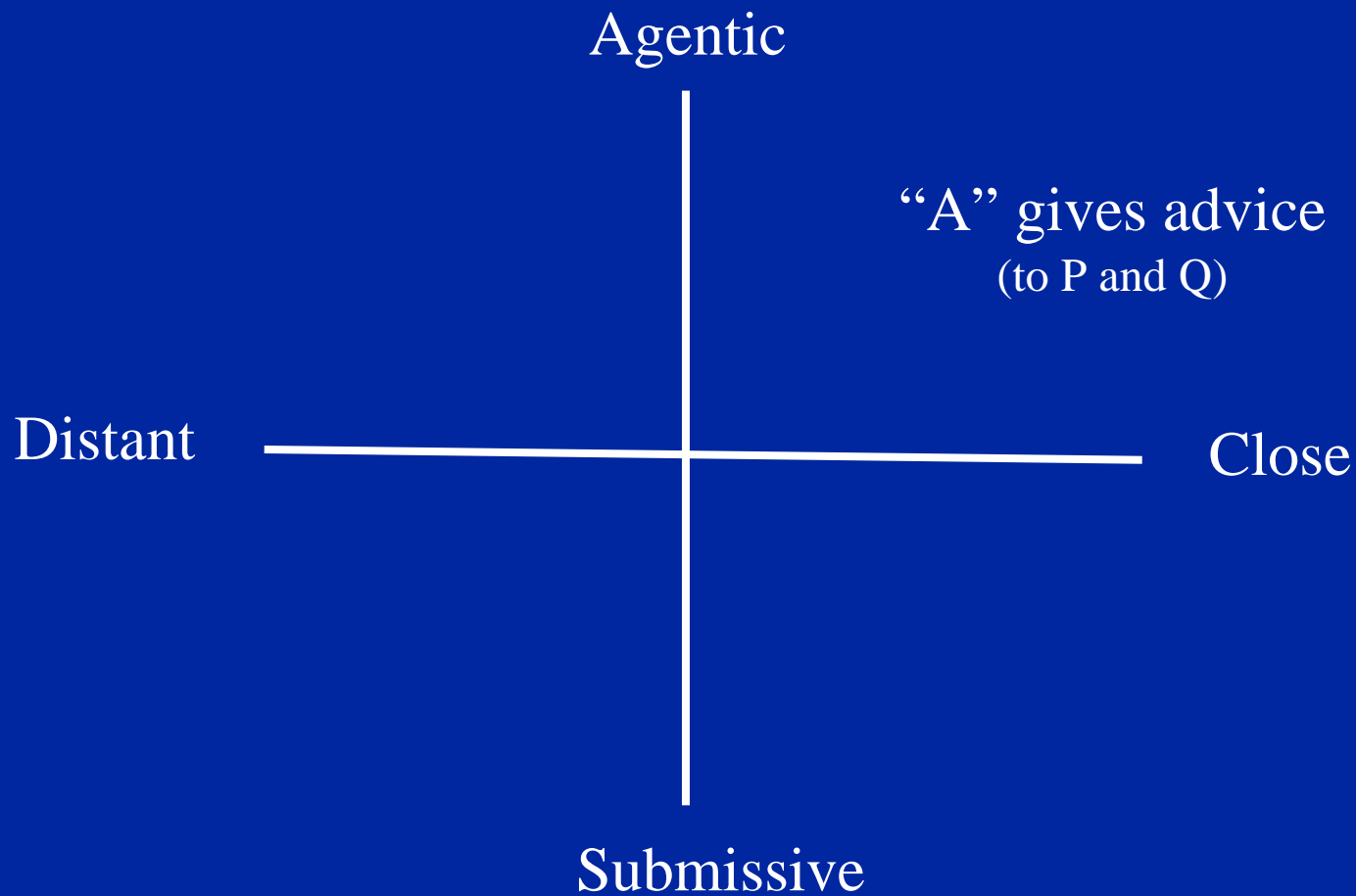
QUESTION: Why do they find this allergen irritating?

Were their reasons the same?

An irritant implies a frustrated motive:

Were their frustrated motives the same?

Circumplex Model of Interpersonal Motives



An Illustrative Case

Allergen P:

“P follows me everywhere, clings to me like a child; I have to take care of her.”

Four participants rated this allergen 6 or higher.
All included it among their 3 strongest irritants.

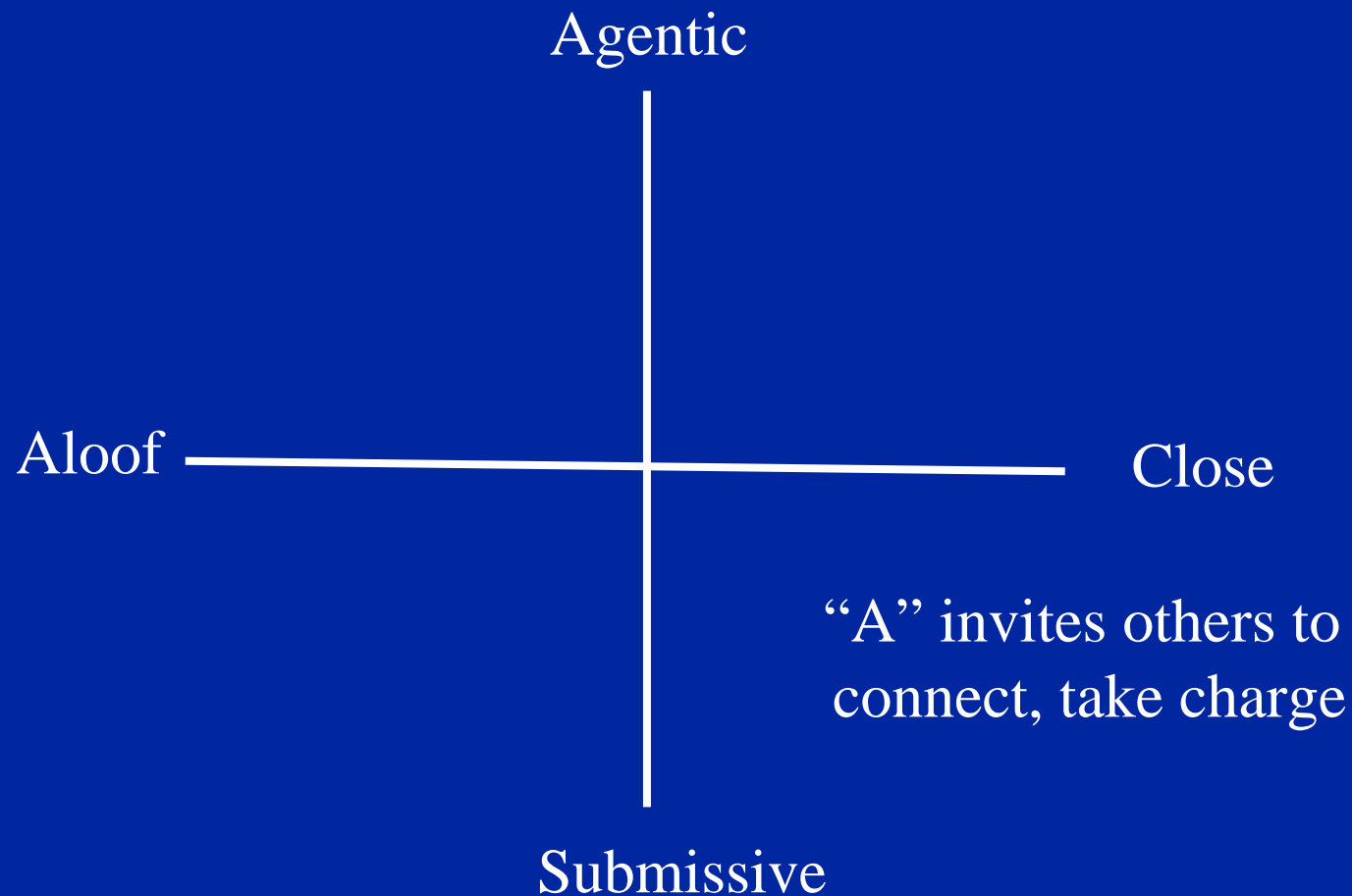
QUESTION: Why do they find this allergen irritating?

Were their reasons the same?

An irritant implies a frustrated motive:

Were their frustrated motives the same?

Frustrated Interpersonal Motives



Students gave reasons for feeling irritated

Procedure:

1. Students were asked to say why they felt frustrated and annoyed.
2. 10 raters then “translated” each person’s reason into “frustrated interpersonal goals.”
 - a. Each rater selected goals on Locke’s Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Values that seemed to be frustrated.
 - b. All goals selected by 6 or more raters were taken to be the “translation” of the person’s own stated reason for feeling irritated.

Reasons given by 5 participants

Allergen:

H. is always telling me what to do; he is arrogant and acts superior.

Why does this person irritate you?

Student # 1: I usually know what I'm doing.

Student #10: I value equality.

Student # 15: I feel like I am not being seen or heard.

Student # 17: They don't take your feelings into consideration.

Student # 93: Keeps me from finding my own way if someone is in my face.

Translation of Reason into Frustrated Goals

Allergen:

H. is always telling me what to do; he is arrogant and acts superior.

Participant # 1.

It is important to me that. . .

PA 41. they not tell me what to do.

BC 36. I am the one in charge.

Participant #10

It is important to me that. . .

PA 17. I get the chance to voice my views.

NO 30. they respect what I have to say.

NO 46. they show me respect.

NO 62. they listen to what I have to say.

Ratings of Allergen

Allergen:

H. is always telling me what to do; he is arrogant and acts superior.

Participant # 15.

It is important to me that. . .

PA 17. I get the chance to voice my views.

PA 57. they admit it when they are wrong.

LM 11. they show interest in what I have to say.

LM 27. they understand me.

NO 22. I express myself openly

NO 30. they respect what I have to say

NO 46. they show me respect

NO 62. they listen to what I have to say

Ratings of Allergen

Allergen:

H. is always telling me what to do; he is arrogant and acts superior.

Participant #17

It is important to me that. . .

LM 27. they understand me.

LM 43. they are considerate.

LM 59. they show concern for how I'm feeling.

NO 30. they respect what I have to say.

NO 46. they show me respect.

NO 62. they listen to what I have to say.

Ratings of Allergen

Allergen:

He is always telling me what to do; he is arrogant and acts superior.

Participant #93

It is important to me that. . .

PA 17. I get the chance to voice my views.

PA 41. They not tell me what to do.

BC 36. I am the one in charge.

BC 60. They mind their own business.

DE 31. They keep their distance from me.

NO 06. I am unique.

NO 30. they respect what I have to say.

NO 46. they show me respect.

Study 2: Are a person's most salient goals related to that person's main allergens?

Notice the most commonly frustrated goals of Allergen H:

They were in Octant NO.

Question:

Would people with particularly strong interpersonal goals in NO be the ones most apt to experience irritation from Allergen H?

Participants: 44 undergraduate students (28 in introductory psychology, 15 in undergraduate dorm).

Measures:

- Locke's Circumplex Scale of Interpersonal Values
- 24 item Social Allergen Scale

Study 2: Results

Allergen H:

He is always telling me what to do; he is arrogant and acts superior.

Results:

People with strong interpersonal goals in NO were indeed more likely to be irritated by Allergen H., as were those with strong interpersonal goals in LM.

Interestingly

Allergen P:

P. follows me everywhere, clings to me like a child; I have to take care of her.

Results:

People with strong interpersonal goals in BC, DE, HI, as well as NO were more likely to be irritated by someone who was clingy, confirming the frustration of different motives in different people.

Summary

Preliminary findings:

Thus, social allergens mean different things to different people.

The allergic reaction appears due, at least partially, to a frustrated interpersonal motive.

These results need to be extended to different social allergens.

Treatment Implications

Clarifying frustrated interpersonal motives will help regulate irritation, and help the allergic person to satisfy motives in a different manner.

It may also be important to know the interpersonal motives behind the irritating behavior.

Clarifying those motives may help the allergenic person meet interpersonal goals without being a source of irritation to others.

Thank you

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