
Social Allergens and Frustrated Interpersonal Motives

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Social Allergens

“... behaviors or features of other people that grate on your nerves” (O’Connor, 2004).

“... a repeated unpleasant behavior that produces a reaction of escalating annoyance or disgust.”
(Cunningham, et al., 2004).

Some Examples

1. H is always telling me what to do: he is arrogant and acts superior.
2. P follows me everywhere, clings to me like a child; I have to take care of her.
3. B has to be the center of attention and continually talks about herself.
4. D is aloof and distant and hard to get to know.
5. N tells me more about herself than I want to know.

→ Resemblance to personality disorders?

Interpersonal Analysis

To begin with, we need to distinguish between:

- the irritatinging person
- the one who gets irritateded

Three questions:

- What is the irritatinging person trying to get from other people?
- Why does he or she irritate others? What frustrated motive produces irritation?
- Who is most apt to become irritated?

To answer these questions, we draw upon our revised interpersonal theory:

1. An interpersonal behavior is driven by a person's motives.
 - Behavior by itself is often ambiguous.
 - The motive behind an interpersonal behavior tells its meaning
--Motive may be communal, agentic, or a combination.
2. When a behavior occurs, it invites a "complement".
 - Connecting behavior invites connecting behavior. . .
 - An attempt to influence invites yielding behavior. . .
3. When the complement is denied, a motive is frustrated, producing negative affect (e.g., irritation).
4. The person who gets irritated is irritated because an interpersonal motive is frustrated. (Horowitz, et al, 2006)

Study 1: Describing the Irritating Person (Prototype Methodology)

Selected stimuli: 103 nominators; 90 raters

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.

Study 1: What is the irritating person trying to get from other people?

1. 40 attributes were generated by three or more people for Person H, 36 for Person P.
2. These attributes were rated for their prototypicality.

How accurately do you think each characteristic describes H?

**Not accurate
accurate**

1

2

3

Accurate

4

5

Extremely

6

7

Prototype of Person H (some of the 40 characteristics)

bossy	←	5.8
controlling, domineering	←	5.6
overbearing, overpowering		5.4
annoying, irritating	←	5.3
self-centered, egocentric, self-absorbed		5.3
demanding		5.2
a bully, intimidating		4.9
does not listen well		4.8
confident, self-assured	←	4.5
not compassionate, uncaring		4.4
talkative, loquacious		4.2
uninterested in other people		4.0
insecure, lacks self-confidence	←	3.8
intelligent, smart		3.0

Prototype of Person P (some of the 36 characteristics)

dependent, not self-reliant	←	6.0
insecure, lacks self-confidence	←	5.6
afraid to take risks	←	5.2
wants approval, wants to please	←	5.2
lonely		5.3
sensitive, fragile, is easily hurt		4.8
annoying, irritating	←	4.8
idealizes others		4.6
boring, suffocating		4.4
passive		4.3
naïve		4.1
loving, kind		3.9
sad, depressed		3.7
insensitive to others		2.8
stupid, unintelligent		2.4

Study 2: Why do people get irritated at Person H? (What motive is frustrated?)

Person H:

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

104 participants, (84%) of a sample of 124 undergraduates:

- rated their annoyance in response to this person as 6 or higher (1-7).
- gave reasons for their annoyance

Stated Reasons

Reasons that explain why I find this person irritating:

- **I feel I like to be a peer, not a subordinate to friends.**
- **Cocky people are entitled to their beliefs, but don't have to express it into my face.**

Why the irritation at Person P?

Person P:

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

71 participants, 58% of the sample:

- rated their annoyance in response to this person as 6 or higher (1-7).
- gave reasons for their annoyance

Stated Reasons

Reasons that explain why I find this person irritating:

- **Closer to me than I want to be to her.**
- **Clingy needy people - the kind you can't get rid of. I don't want to have to cater to them and their dependence, it's restricting.**

Raters translated people's reasons into frustrated motives or goals

Procedure:

1. Eight raters “translated” each reason into “frustrated interpersonal goals,” using Locke’s CSIV (Locke, 2000).
2. Every goal selected by 5 or more raters constituted the “translation” of the person’s reason into a frustrated motive.

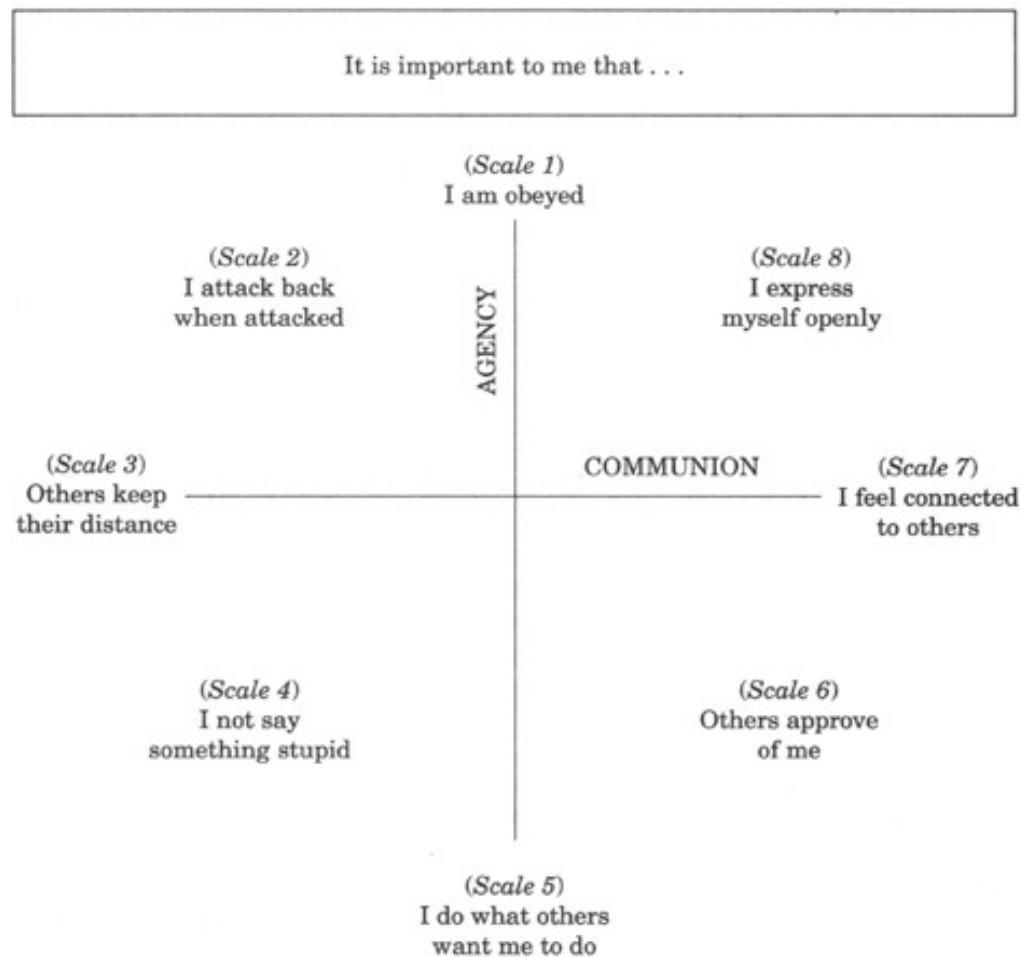


Figure 6.1. Illustrative items: Locke's (2000) measures of motives.

Raters translated reasons into “frustrated goals”

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

Reasons explaining why I find this person irritating:

I feel I like to be a peer, not a subordinate to friends.

Translation: It is important to me that. . .

PA 41. they not tell me what to do.

NO 30. they respect what I have to say

NO 46. they show me respect

Arrogance - they think they are so much better.

Translation: It is important to me that. . .

PA 9. they acknowledge when I am right

NO 46. they show me respect

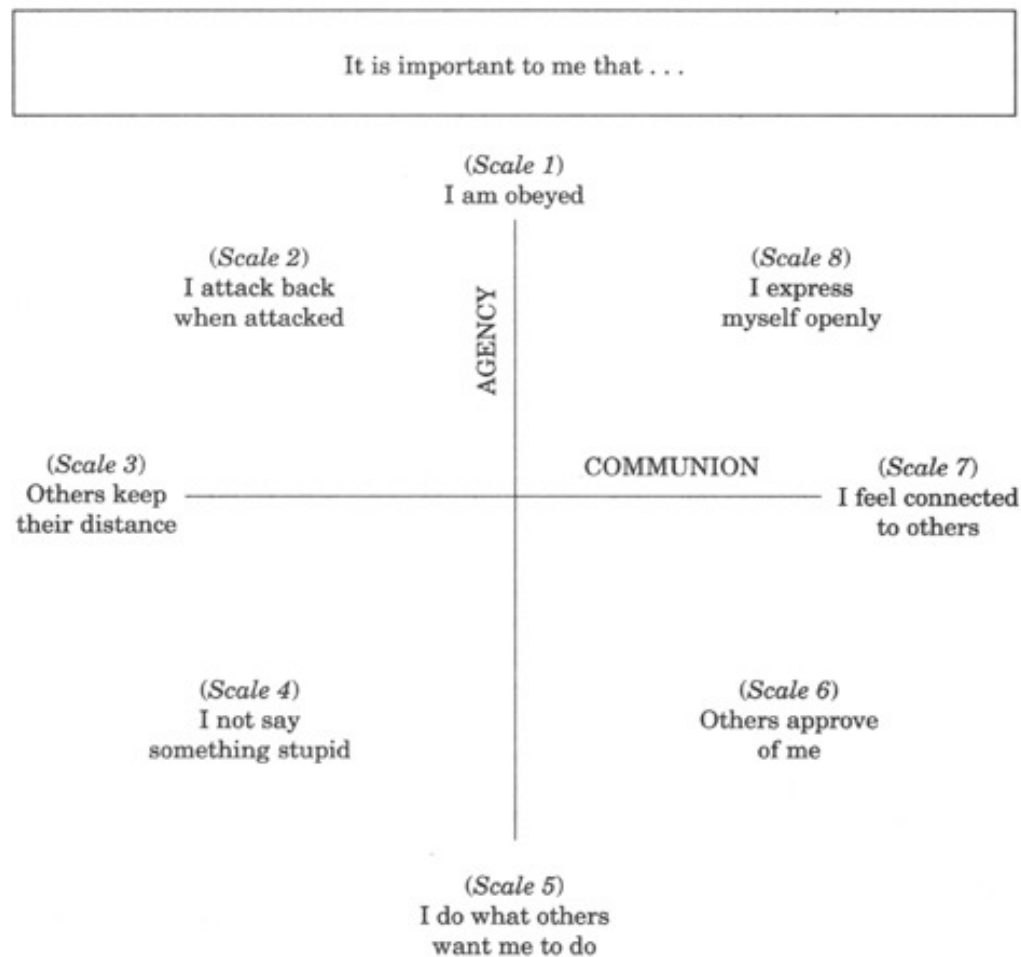


Figure 6.1. Illustrative items: Locke's (2000) measures of motives.

Translating reasons into frustrated goals

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

Reasons that explain why I find this person irritating:

- **Closer to me than I want to be, constantly push the issue about status of friendship/relationship/etc and always want more.**

Translation: It is important to me that. . .

DE 31. they keep their distance from me.

- **I don't want to have to cater to them and their dependence, it's restricting.**

Translation: It is important to me that. . .

PA 25. they respect my privacy

BC 28. I put my needs first

DE 31. they keep their distance from me.

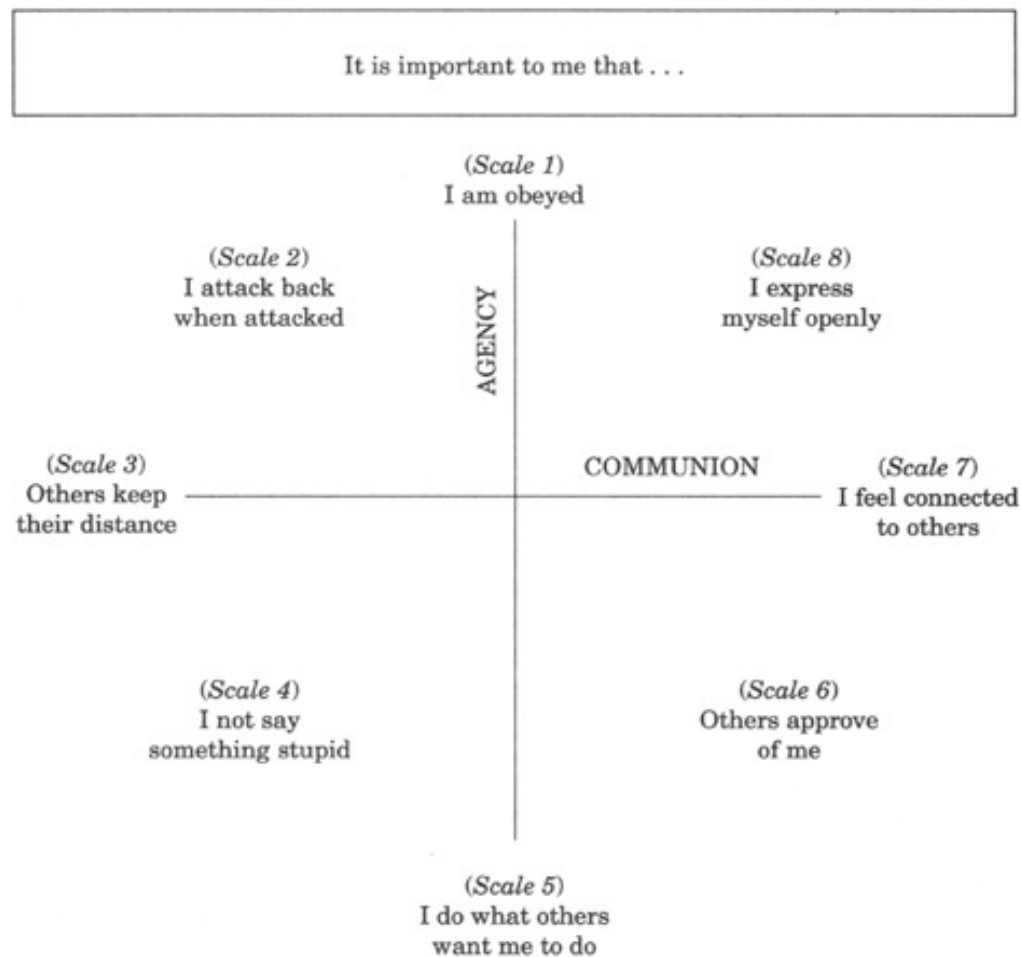


Figure 6.1. Illustrative items: Locke's (2000) measures of motives.

Study 3: Who is apt to be irritated?

The most commonly frustrated goals in response to Allergen **H** were in Octant **PA** and **NO**.

The most commonly frustrated goals in response to Allergen **P** were in **BC** and **DE**.

Therefore:

**People with strong goals in PA and NO should find H irritating.
People with strong goals in BC and DE should find P irritating.**

Participants: 57 undergraduate students

Measures:

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

Noteworthy Findings: Person H

Noteworthy and significant findings according to a backward multiple regression were these, $F(5,51) = 9.34, p < .0001$.

1. The higher a participant was in agency (**PA**), the more irritated by H.
2. In addition, the more a participant wanted to avoid embarrassment or needed others' approval (**FG, JK**) the more irritated by H.

These findings suggest that dominant people, and those who believe they can't defend themselves, are the most irritated.

Noteworthy Findings: Person P

A noteworthy and significant finding according to a backward multiple regression was this, $F(1,55) = 4.10$, $p < .05$:

The more someone wanted distance (**DE**) the more bugged he or she was by someone who was clingy.

Conclusions

1. The prototype clarifies the irritating person's wants
 - Person H: to boss, control, dominate
 - Person P: to be taken care of, to obtain approval
2. The irritated person is frustrated by these “invitations”
 - If irritated by Person H: Frustrated desire for respect, to “be heard”
 - If irritated by Person P: Frustrated desire for distance, space
3. These allergic reactions are most likely in people with strong relevant motives
 - If agentic motive is strong, more apt to be irritated by Person H
 - If negative communal motive (for distance, separateness) is strong, more apt to be irritated by Person P

Thank you

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