

ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (ASQ)

Reference:

Peterson, C., Semmel, A., von Baeyer, C., Abramson, L. Y., Metalsky, G. I., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1982). The Attributional Style Questionnaire. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 6, 287-299.

Description of Measure:

48-item questionnaire that measures an individual's explanatory style (positive versus negative). The questionnaire is made up of 12 hypothetical events (6 good and 6 bad), each followed by 4 questions: (1) a free-response question about the cause of the hypothetical event, (2) a question about whether the event has an internal or external cause (i.e., how much respondents believe they themselves are responsible for the event) (3) a question about whether the event has a stable or unstable cause (i.e., how much respondents believe the cause of the event is present over time), (4) a question about whether the event has a global or specific cause (i.e., how much the respondents believe the cause of the event occurs across varying conditions). The first question is not scored and is used to prepare the respondent to answer questions 2-4. Questions 2-4 are answered on a 7-point scale.

An optimistic explanatory style is characterized by the following:

If the event is negative:

External + Unstable + Specific

If the event is positive:

Internal + Stable + Global

A negative explanatory style is characterized in the opposite way.

Abstracts of Selected Related Articles:

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1984). Causal explanations as a risk factor for depression: Theory and evidence. *Psychological Review*, 91, 347-374.

The attributional reformulation of the learned helplessness model claims that an explanatory style in which bad events are explained by internal, stable, and global causes is associated with depressive symptoms. Furthermore, this style is claimed to be a risk factor for subsequent depression when bad events are encountered. We describe a variety of new investigations of the helplessness reformulation that employ five research strategies: (a) cross-sectional correlational studies, (b) longitudinal studies, (c) experiments of nature, (d) laboratory experiments, and (e) case studies. Taken together, these studies converge in their support for the learned helplessness reformulation.

Peterson, C. (1991). The meaning and measurement of explanatory style. *Psychological Inquiry*, 2, 1-10.

Explanatory style is a cognitive personality variable reflecting the way that people habitually explain the causes of bad events. Explanatory style spans three dimensions-internality versus externality, stability versus instability, and globality versus specificity. Although explanatory style has an impressive array of correlates, including depression, achievement, and physical well-being, questions have recently been raised concerning its meaning and measurement. This article identifies and discusses these questions, concluding that

explanatory style is a useful construct that deserves further theoretical and empirical attention.

Lee, Y., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1997). Are Americans more optimistic than the Chinese. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 32-40.

A total of 613 subjects, including 257 'White American students, 312 mainland Chinese students, and 44 Chinese American students, completed the Attributional Style Questionnaire. It was found that (a) mainland Chinese were more pessimistic than Chinese Americans, who were more pessimistic than 'White Americans, (b) mainland Chinese were less self-blaming (i.e., attributed their failure less internally than the traditional Chinese culture expects) and attributed their success to other people or circumstances, and (c) 'White Americans had more lopsidedness on self-serving bias than Chinese Americans and mainland Chinese –that is, 'White Americans attributed their success to themselves and their failure to others or circumstances more often than did mainland Chinese. The authors also found that mainland Chinese optimism was associated more with academic and financial accomplishment, psychological confidence and persistence, and physical health.

Peterson, C., & Villanova, P. (1988). An expanded attributional style questionnaire. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 97, 87-89.

Investigations of the learned helplessness model of depression have been hampered by the modest reliability of measures of explanatory style: the habitual tendency to explain bad events with internal, stable, and global causes. We describe a new measure of explanatory style, the Expanded Attributional Style Questionnaire, and its use in a preliminary study with 140 college students. Individual dimensions of explanatory style were reliable, were correlated with depressive symptoms, and predicted actual causal explanations for bad events 4 weeks later. Research implications are discussed.

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