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## **Relationship of Cognitive Attributional Style and Academic Performance Among a Predominantly Hispanic College Student Population**

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**ABSTRACT** - The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether attributional style would predict grades of predominantly Hispanic college students. The Extended Attributional Style Questionnaire (EASQ) was administered to 179 undergraduate college students enrolled at a predominantly Hispanic university in South Texas. The EASQ subscales Generality, Consequences, and Self were significantly negatively correlated with final course grade. However, the Internal subscale was not significantly correlated with grades. These results characterize students who achieve lower academic performance as having a more negative attributional style.

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Studies of attributional style as a predictor of academic achievement have produced mixed results (Yee, Pierce, Ptacek, & Modzelesky, 2003). For example, Henry, Martinko, and Pierce (1993) examined attributional style as a predictor of performance in a college computer course. In their sample, participants with an optimistic attributional style performed better than those with a pessimistic attributional style. Haddad (2001) found that negative attributional style predicted lower final grades. On the other hand, in a comparison of the predictive values of SAT, high school grade point average, and attributional style on college grades, Bridges (2001) found no correlation between attributional style and grades.

Others have found a negative correlation with negative attributional style and academic performance. For example, Satterfield, Monahan, and Seligman (1997) found that law students who made stable, global, and internal attributions for

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negative events outperformed more optimistic students. Yee et al. (2003) found that a helpless attributional style was positively related to improvements in performance in the second half of the semester. LaForge and Cantrell (2003) also found that students with pessimistic explanatory styles outperformed students with optimistic explanatory styles. Houston (1994) found a consistent relationship between attributional style and academic performance. In her study, students with a stable, global orientation performed well on academic tasks.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between attributional style and final grades of predominantly Hispanic college students.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Participants were 180 college students recruited from psychology and sociology courses taught in the Department of Psychology and Sociology at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Students received extra credit for participating in the study. Seventy-two percent were female (129) and 28% were male (51). The sample was predominantly Hispanic (67.2%), with Caucasians at 17.8%, African Americans at 10.0%, Asian-Americans at 2.2%, Native American at 1.1%, and Other at 1.7%. The mean age was 24.0 with a standard deviation of 8.0 and a range of 18 to 61.

Hispanics totaled 121, with 89 females and 32 males. The mean age of the Hispanic sample was 23.3, standard deviation 7.1, and range 18 to 57.

### ***Research Design***

This study was a prospective correlational design. The predictor variables were attributional style components measured at the beginning of the semester. The dependent variable was final grade at the end of the course.

### ***Instruments***

An ad hoc questionnaire was devised to collect demographic data. Attributional style was assessed with the Extended Attributional Style Questionnaire (EASQ; Metalsky, Halberstadt, & Abramson, 1987). Metalsky et al. report adequate reliability and validity of the instrument.

The four EASQ subscales reported by Metalsky et al. are:

Generality – the average of stability and globality. Stability is the attribution that negative events will continue. Globality is the attribution that a wide variety of negative events will occur.

Consequences – “generalized tendency to infer that negative life events are going to lead to dire consequences.”

Self – “generalized tendency to make negative inferences about self given that a negative life event has occurred.”

Internality – attribution of personal fault or blame for negative events.

### **Procedure**

Participants were solicited from various psychology and sociology classes at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Volunteers were asked to report at a later time to complete the instruments. Identification (ID) codes were assigned to protect the confidentiality of the demographic and attribution data. One researcher maintained the "ID Code to Name" table which was kept separate from the data entry task. At the end of the semester, instructors were asked to provide the final grade of their students. The grades were matched by student name to the ID code. Grades were input via ID code by research assistants.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Correlational analysis and multiple regression analysis were run between the four Attributional dimensions and final grades.

### **Results and Discussion**

Three of the EASQ subscales were significantly negatively correlated with the final grades ( $p < .01$ ). They were Generality ( $r = -.25$ ), Consequences ( $r = -.23$ ) and Self ( $r = -.21$ ). However, the Internal ( $r = -.08$ ) subscale was not significantly ( $p > .05$ ) correlated with grades.

A multiple regression was run using all four of the independent measures. The multiple correlation coefficient was  $R = .268$  with an adjusted multiple  $R$  squared of .051. In this sample, cognitive attribution accounted for about 5% of the variance in the final grades. The effect of cognitive attribution was slighter higher for the Hispanic portion of the sample. The multiple correlation coefficient was  $R = .315$  with an adjusted multiple  $R$  squared of .068. In this sample, cognitive attributions accounted for 6.8% of the variance in the final grades of the Hispanic students.

The results of this study showed that attributional style, as measured by the EASQ, accounted for 5.1% of the variance in final grades. For the Hispanic portion of the sample, attributional style accounted for 6.8% of the variance in final grades.

There are limitations to the present study which should be considered before generalizing the results. For instance, the sample was taken from students enrolled in psychology and sociology courses at a small university in South Texas. It is not known if these results would apply to other university students or other Hispanic college students. Further studies should investigate other factors that contribute to the variation in final grades not explained by cognitive attributional style.

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