

## **Chapter 4: Understanding Others**

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- The Accuracy of Snap Judgments

### From Acts to Dispositions: The Importance of Causal Attribution

- The Pervasiveness and Importance of Causal Attribution
- Explanatory Style and Attribution

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### Beyond the Internal/External Dimension

## **Snap Judgments**

We can make judgments about people rather quickly.

We make judgments of trustworthiness and dominance rather quickly. This process is unconscious and automatic.

- Politicians who were seen for 1 second were judged on competency. Those who were seen as more competent won 69% of the races.

However, winning the election does not necessarily mean those politicians were more competent (which is a more complex question)

- Three 10 second clips of professor's performance in the classroom were shown to participants. Those who rated as warm and competent were more likely to receive more favorable course evaluations.

However, whether they are warm and competent and offered a good course is a difficult question.

Our snap judgments of others occur automatically and unconsciously and without our awareness. And these snap judgments affect how we construe our experiences.

## **Explanatory Style and Attribution**

We can succeed or fail at what we do. Just as important as to whether we succeed or fail at what we do is how we explain or attribute our success or failure.

Explanatory Style: A person's habitual way of explaining events along three dimensions: internal/external, stable/unstable, and global specific.

Internal / External: Is the event due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?

Stable / Unstable: Will the cause be present in the future or not?

Global / Specific: Is the cause something that influences other areas of their lives or just one area?

Psychologists look at two basic types of explanatory styles: optimistic versus pessimistic.

- Optimistic explanatory styles are external, unstable and specific explanations
- Pessimistic explanatory styles are internal, stable and global explanations

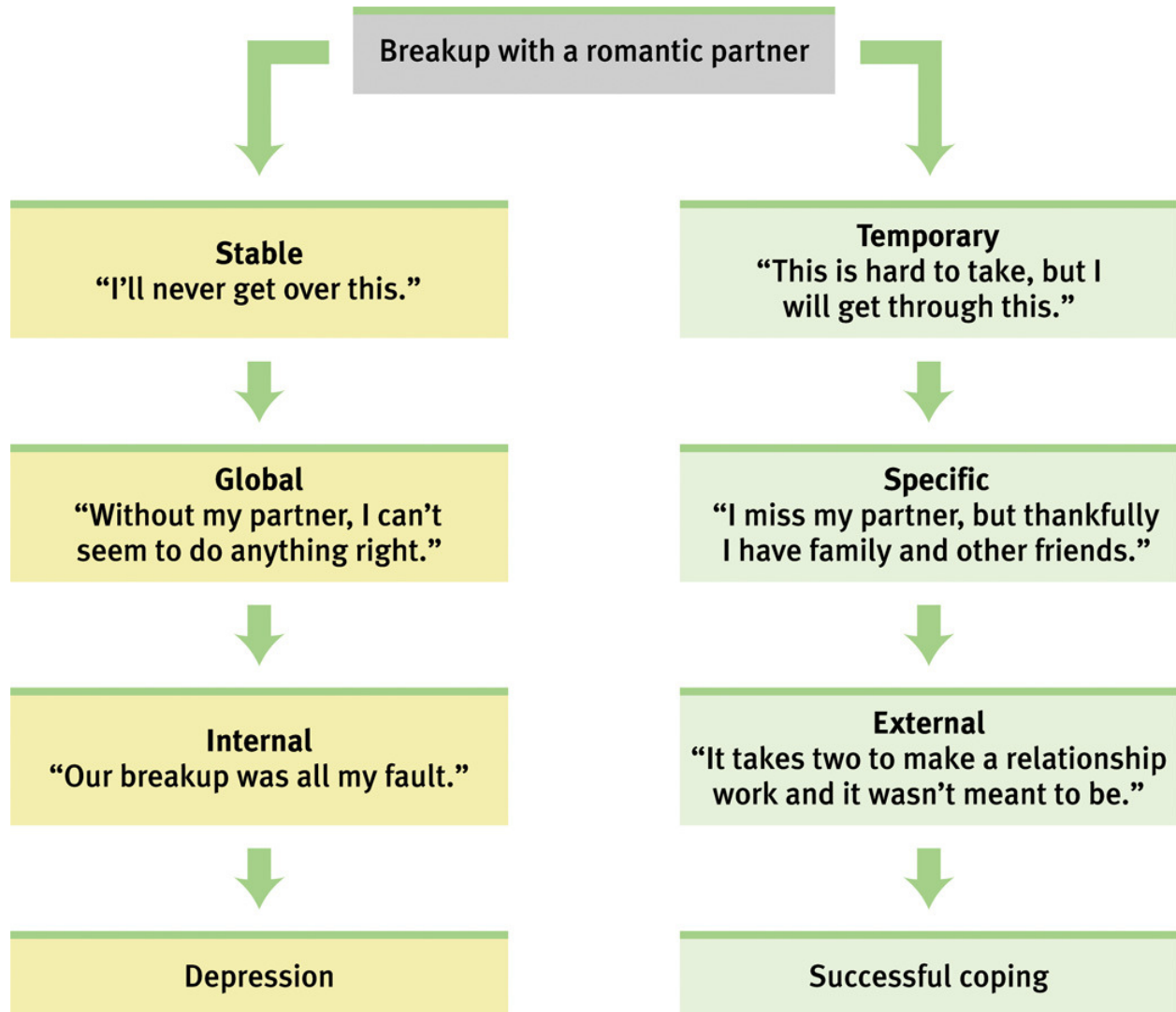
## Explanatory Style and Attribution



How come you didn't get the project completed?

	Stable	Internal	Global
Associated with depression	I'm no good at this job	I can't do anything right	I can't use computers
	Unstable	External	Specific
Not associated with depression	Company resources were tied up	The project was hard	I can't use Dreamweaver

## Explanatory Style and Attribution



## Explanatory Style and Attribution



(image source: Huffman and Carpenter)



Those with a optimistic explanatory style tend to earn higher grades than those with a pessimistic explanatory style.

What is as important as the objective reality, is how we construe events.

## Explanatory Style and Attribution

In addition, optimistic explanatory style is associated with healthier outcomes later in life (see Table 4.2, page 117).

**TABLE 4.2 Does Explanatory Style Early in Life Predict Later Physical Health?**

The correlation between explanatory style at age 25 and physical health at seven points in life, with earlier physical health controlled statistically.

Age	Correlation
30	.04
35	.03
40	.13
45	.37*
50	.18
55	.22*
60	.25*

\*Denotes statistically significant correlation.

Source: Peterson, Seligman, & Vaillant (1988).

Social Psychology, 2/e Table 4.2  
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Pessimistic explanatory styles increase the likelihood of negative thoughts (and you see more stressors).

Optimistic explanatory styles may push people to engage in behaviors that are likely to be associated with health (exercising, good diet, etc.) and failure can be viewed as something that is under your control (control is helpful for stress reduction).

People who view homosexuality as biological in nature are more sympathetic toward gays and lesbians, women who view math as doable are more likely to persist in the face of challenges.



## Counterfactual Thinking

Counterfactual Thinking: Thoughts of what might have, could have, or should have happened “if only” something had been done differently.

**FIGURE 4.5 Scientific Method: Counterfactual Thinking among Olympic Medalists**

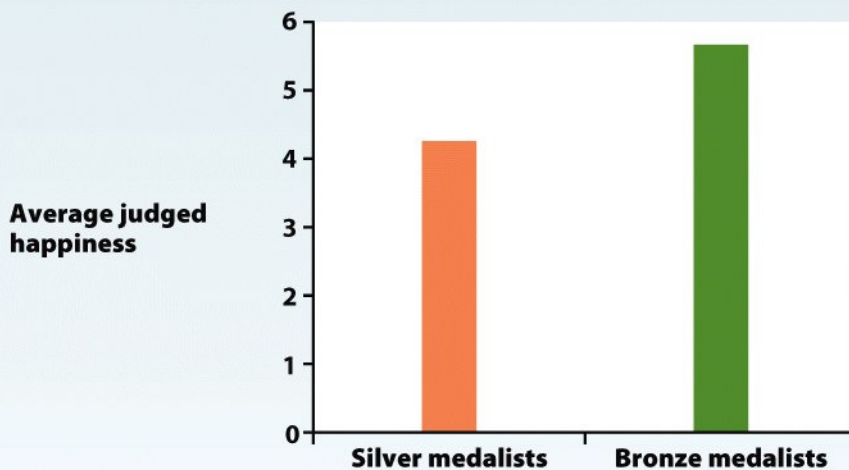
**Hypothesis:** People’s emotional responses to events are influenced by their thoughts about “what might have been.”

**Research Method:**

- 1 Researchers videotaped all televised coverage of the 1992 summer Olympic games in Barcelona, Spain.
- 2 They had college students who didn’t know anything about the athletes examine their smiles and grimaces and rate how happy each athlete appeared.
- 3 The students rated the athletes shown immediately after finishing their events and when shown on the podium.



**Results:** Silver medalists, who finished second, seemed to be less happy than the bronze medalists they had outperformed.



**Conclusion:** People react to events based not only on what they are, but also on what they are not. Silver medals are often experienced as *not* a gold medal, and so may be enjoyed less than bronze medals, which are often experienced as *not* an also-ran.

Source: Medvec, Madey, & Gilovich (1995).