

## ЗАГАЛЬНА ПСИХОЛОГІЯ, ІСТОРІЯ ПСИХОЛОГІЇ

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### PSYCHODIAGNOSTIC POSSIBILITIES OF ATTRIBUTIVE PERSONALITY STYLES STUDYING

### ПСИХОДІАГНОСТИЧНІ МОЖЛИВОСТІ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ АТРИБУТИВНИХ СТИЛІВ ОСОБИСТОСТІ

Attribution in psychological science generally refers to the attribution of characteristics to social objects that are not represented in the field of perception, as well as the causes and motives of behavior, personal qualities and characteristics based on the analysis of their actions and deeds. The need for attribution as a means of interaction between an individual and the surrounding reality is due to the fact that the information that observation can provide to a person is not enough for adequate interaction with the surrounding reality, including the social environment, and requires «completion». Attribution is the main way to ensure this «completion».

Attribution is one of the main objects of social and psychological research. Initially, the phenomenon of attribution was defined as an explanatory phenomenon regarding the causes of human behavior (causal attribution) and interpersonal perception. Later, the concept of attribution included an expanded class of phenomena that denoted the attribution of many psychological characteristics, as well as characteristics of not only psychological but also other social phenomena and objects. Attribution in this sense is defined as the leading mechanism of social perception, which makes it possible to include perceived objects in the semantic system of the individual.

The article shows that the breadth of coverage of psychological phenomena included in the concept of attributional style of personality gives grounds for analyzing the psychodiagnostic possibilities available in modern psychological science in relation to the phenomenon under analysis, highlighting the features of the study of attributional styles, the main directions of such a study, and the key areas of scientific and applied interest of researchers.

It is summarized that attributional styles in general are a thorough field for psychological research, and allow studying different age, social, professional and other groups, determining the specific attributional style of certain defined groups, summarizing the actual problematic aspects of the mental activity of members of such groups, outlining possible emotional or cognitive disorders, describing certain distinctive neoplasms associated with the specifics of the groups under study. The study of attributional styles makes it possible to visualize general and specific types of a person's response to certain situations, and, as a result, highlights problem areas in the mental health of the studied groups. The results of the study of attributive styles provide a primary generalized picture of the elements of the mental state of a person and make it possible to develop a specialized system of psychological diagnosis of an individual.

**Key words:** attributional style, attributional biases, causal attribution, personal attributions, personalized behavioral style.

Атрибуція у психологічній науці загалом позначає приписування соціальним об'єктам характеристик, не представлених у полі сприйняття, а також причин і мотивів поведінки, особистісних якостей і характеристик на основі аналізу їхніх дій і вчинків. Необхідність атрибуції як засобу взаємодії індивіда з оточуючою дійсністю обумовлена тим, що інформації, яку може дати людині спостереження, недостатньо для адекватної взаємодії із оточуючою дійсністю, зокрема соціальним оточенням, і потребує «добудови». Атрибуція є основним способом забезпечення такої «добудови».

Атрибуція є одним з основних об'єктів соціально-психологічних досліджень. Початково феномен атрибуції позначався як пояснювальний феномен щодо причин поведінки людини (каузальна атрибуція) та міжособистісного сприйняття. В подальшому уявлення про атрибуцію включило розширений клас явищ, що позначали приписування багатьох психологічних характеристик, а також характеристики не лише психологічних, а й інших соціальних явищ та об'єктів. Атрибуція у такому розумінні визначається як провідний механізм соціального сприйняття, що дає змогу включати сприйняті об'єкти у смислову систему особистості.

У статті показано, що широта охоплення психологічних феноменів, що включаються у поняття атрибутивного стилю особистості, дає підстави для аналізу психодіагностичних можливостей, які є у сучасній психологічній науці щодо аналізованого явища, виокремленні особливостей дослідження атрибутивних стилів, основних напрямків такого дослідження, та ключових зон наукового і прикладного інтересу дослідників.

Підсумовано, що атрибутивні стилі загалом є ґрунтовним полем для психологічного дослідження, та дають змогу вивчати різні вікові, соціальні, професійні й інші групи, визначаючи специфічну атрибутивну стилістику певних визначених груп, узагальнюючи актуальні проблемні аспекти психічної діяльності членів таких груп, окреслюючи можливі емоційні чи когнітивні порушення, описуючи певні відмітні новоутворення, пов'язані зі специфікою досліджуваних груп. Вивчення атрибутивних стилів дає можливість унаочнення загально-специфічних типів реагування особи на певні ситуації, та, як наслідок увиразнює проблемні місця у психічному здоров'ї досліджуваних груп. Результати вивчення атрибутивних стилів дають первинну узагальнену картину елементів психічного стану особи та дають можливість розробки спеціалізованої системи психологічної діагностики індивіда.

**Ключові слова:** атрибутивний стиль, атрибутивні упередження, каузальна атрибуція, особистісні атрибуції, персоналізований стиль поведінки.

**Statement of the problem.** The concept of attributional style of personality refers to a common way of explaining the causes and consequences of adverse events [1], and reveals stable personality characteristics of the course of attributional processes [2]. We define the concept of «attributional style of personality» as a complex set of stable cognitive and mental structures that include models of cause and effect relationships between phenomena and are actualized by a person every time he or she encounters emotionally significant life events [41].

The main psychological features of attributional styles of personality include its ability to determine a person's stable tendency to perceive and explain life events through the prism of established cognitive criteria, the presence of positive or negative valence underlying a person's tendency to optimism or pessimism, and the close connection of attributional styles with emotional experiences, motivation, and communicative behavior of a person.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The issue of developing tools for measuring attributional styles is evolving as research on attributional styles of different age, social, cultural, professional, and other groups of subjects is expanding. Attributional style was initially measured primarily with the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ), in which subjects rated themselves on 12 items in which respondents read about a situation, wrote a causal statement about the event, and then rated the statement on internal dimensions (stability and globality) that relate to whether the attributions can be applied to a wide or narrow range of situations.

Later, the Internal Personal and Situational Attributions Questionnaire (IPSAQ) was developed to further distinguish between attributing causation to other individuals (intrapersonal) or to situational factors (extrapersonal). Initial research with the IPSAQ found an externalizing personalization bias in individuals with paranoia, in which causation of negative events is disproportionately attributed to others. However, later studies with the IPSAQ found no difference between patients with schizophrenia and controls [31].

The Optimistic Attributional Style Questionnaire (OASQ) was developed by Sawamiya & Tagami [40]. The authors identified three scales: stability, globality, and control, which analyzed the attribution of personality in the continuum of «success and failure situations». We should also note such a diagnostic tool for self-assessment of attributional styles as the Child Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ-R), which allows for the study of attributional parameters in children.

The DASQ (Attributional Style of Doctor Questionnaire) was developed by Tian & Wang [43] to measure the attributional style of doctors. The authors emphasize that the existing instruments do not take into account clinical events and are not suitable for measuring the attributional style of a doctor. After all, the attributional style of clinical professionals affects their emotions and behavior, as well as how they build relationships with patients. The DASQ consists of 24 items, including the Positive Events Questionnaire and the Negative Events Questionnaire, each of which consists of four dimensions: controllability, globalization, stability, and internality.

Kneebone & Dewar [23] developed and validated the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ-S) for people with multiple sclerosis. The study of attributions for work-related events is presented in the study by Furnham, Sadka, Brewin [14]. The authors validated the OASQ (Occupational Attributional Style Questionnaire) questionnaire they developed. According to the results, the attribution of positive events rather than negative ones was significantly correlated with demographic variables, such as professional status and salary, as well as with job satisfaction and motivation. The study confirms that an «optimistic» internal attribution style at work is associated with job satisfaction and motivation.

As we can see, the range of possibilities for studying attributional styles is significant and extensive. Therefore, the **purpose of the article** is to review the features, leading areas of scientific interest and modern diagnostic capabilities of the study of attributional styles of personality.

**Presentation of the main material.** Attributional style refers to the characteristic ways in which people explain the causal relationship of events. Studies by Miller & Ross [33] and Zuckerman [48] have examined the relationship with external and internal causes, showing that healthy people have self-serving biases and tend to attribute negative events to external causes and attribute positive events to themselves. In addition, healthy people tend to attribute their own negative behavior to situational factors, forming an external-situational attribution style, but attribute the negative behavior of others to personal factors, forming an external-personal attribution style. This normal self-serving bias is attenuated in clinical cohorts with depression and anxiety, but exaggerated in individuals with paranoia, regardless of diagnosis.

Addington D, Addington J, Robinson G. [3] studied the relationship between negative attribution style and depression (on the example of patients with schizophrenic pathology). The authors argue that negative attribution style is a psychological correlate of depression: attributing negative events to internal and global causes is significantly related to depressive symptoms. The authors conclude that the negative attribution style is probably specific to depression, without being a general characteristic of mental pathology.

At the same time, a meta-analytic study conducted by Huang [19] found a moderate correlation between the depressogenic style of explaining negative events and subsequent symptoms of depression.

Robins [37] thoroughly summarized the research conducted at that time that examined the relationship between depression and causal attributions. The author emphasized that, despite the contradictory findings and insufficient statistical power of the studies, in all published works depression was quite consistently associated only with a set of internal, stable, and global attributes. This emphasizes the established nature of attributional styles as causes of depressive states of the individual that are difficult to treat and correct.

Lo, Ho & Hollon [28] show the results of a study of cognitive vulnerability to depression, including negative cognitive style and rumination as separate risk factors for depression. This study examined the relationship between

rumination and negative attributional style. The results showed that a stronger positive relationship between negative attributional style and depressive symptoms was found in the self-focused condition compared to the distraction condition. This finding suggests that the rumination processing mode interacts with depressive symptoms to predict negative attributional style.

The study by Liu, Wang & Peng [46] examined depressive attributional style in terms of its productive impact on personality. Well-known studies show that people prone to depression are characterized by a chronic style of attributing failures to internal, stable and global causes, sometimes called the «depressive attributional style». The authors investigated how socio-cultural factors, such as religious beliefs, can modulate these processes. Using the example of the Buddhist religious group, they show that Buddhism's view of absolute internal control plays a buffering role against the depressive attributional style and reduces its negative impact. The subjects are more likely to attribute bad outcomes to internal, stable, and global causes, i.e., by definition, have a «depressive» attributional style, but this does not affect their well-being. Therefore, none of the attributional styles can be considered positive or negative, the context of the situation plays a decisive role.

Negative attributional style generally interacts with negative life events to predict depression. Cognitive theories of depression argue that people have characteristic ways of understanding negative life events and that those who demonstrate dispositional negative cognitive style and dysfunctional attitudes are at greater risk of developing depression. The hopelessness theory of depression postulates that symptoms of depression are likely to occur when negative life events are attributed to stable and global causes, when they are perceived as linked to other negative future outcomes, and are interpreted as implying personal worthlessness. The negative cognitive style presented in the hopelessness theory, especially in interaction with stressors, predicts prospective symptoms of depression and clinically significant depressive disorders. In the study by Kneebone, Guerrier & Fife-Schaw [24], no significant evidence was found to support the hypothesis of a relationship between negative attributional style and negative life events. The results did not confirm the causal interaction proposed by the hopelessness theory of depression.

Takahira [42] conducted a study of the congruence hypothesis in the hopelessness theory of depression. A longitudinal study was conducted to test two hypotheses – congruence and mediation of hopelessness – in the theory of depression hopelessness. Three cognitive diatheses (attributional style, consequence inference style, and self), symptoms of depression, and hopelessness were measured in a survey of 279 men and women. Approximately three months later, symptoms and hopelessness were measured again, along with negative life events in the interim. There was some support for the congruence hypothesis. Women with a depressive attributional style in the interpersonal domain became depressed when they experienced negative events in this domain, while men with a depressive attributional style in the achievement

domain similarly became depressed. However, no similar effect was found for the other diathesis: inferential styles. The hypothesis of hopelessness mediation was partially confirmed in the interpersonal domain.

The study by Kneebone & Dunmore [25] aimed to develop parameters for assessing hypotheses derived from the hopelessness theory of depression, in particular, to test the hypotheses that negative attributional style is associated with depression symptoms and that negative life events interact with negative attributional style to explain depression. The researchers relied on a sample of individuals with multiple sclerosis who are being treated for depression, which expands the sample representation of the relationship between attributional style and depression in scientific research.

The learned helplessness model, according to Manly, McMahon, and Davidson, postulates that people who make internal, stable, and global attributions of undesirable outcomes are more likely to become depressed when faced with important life events that are perceived as uncontrollable [30]. Thus, attributional style is a significant parameter that is studied in the analysis of depressive manifestations of personality.

The problem of attributional style in the sample of children and adolescents is also the subject of scientific research. Rodriguez & Routh [38] studied depression, anxiety, and attributional style in children with learning disabilities. The influence of attributional style on academic performance was studied by Lapite, Maree & Jordaan [27]. The results showed no significant relationship between attributional style and academic performance (the study was conducted on the example of mathematics). Gender differences were found in the stability and globalization scales, students' socioeconomic status, and their attitudes toward the subject.

Depressive symptoms in children and some components of maladaptive attributional style were found in families with a higher potential for child abuse. Rodriguez's findings [38] indicate emotional difficulties similar to those experienced by maltreated children, even without identified abuse.

Bohon, Stice & Nolen-Hoeksema [7] developed and validated a prospective test of models of cognitive vulnerability to depression in adolescent girls. McQuade, Hoza, & Owens [32] conducted a longitudinal study of depressive symptoms and attributional style in a sample of boys with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In general, it has been shown that a decrease in self-perception in the social sphere implies a more pronounced depressive attributional style, which is more common in childhood (adolescence).

According to the results of Ruan, Shen & Yan [39], obtained on a sample of adolescents, individuals with a tendency to externalize attributions show higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to those with an internal tendency. The authors also show that the impact of social comparison on mental health varies significantly depending on the style of attribution.

The study by Krahe & Möller [26] examined the relationship between exposure to violent electronic games and adolescents' preferences for them, aggressive

norms, and hostile attributional style. A significant relationship was found between attraction to violent electronic games and the adoption of norms that justify physical aggression. Violent electronic games are indirectly related to hostile attributional style through aggressive norms.

A study of a student sample conducted by Houston [18] indicates that internal, stable, and global attribution styles of positive events predict higher academic performance, and global attribution of negative events is associated with poorer academic performance. Stable attribution of negative events is associated with higher academic achievement in high-achieving schools, but not in low-achieving schools. Higher levels of internalizing negative events are associated with higher academic performance only in low-performing schools.

Attribution in relation to coping and adaptation in children with cancer was studied in the research by Frank, Blount & Brown [13]. The influence of children's attributional style, coping, social competence, parental coping, and demographic variables on the psychosocial adaptation of children with cancer was assessed. Indicators of childhood depression are determined by avoidant coping, depressive attribution style and social competence of children. Childhood anxiety was predicted by depressive attribution style, avoidant coping, and age at diagnosis. The child's externalizing behavior was predicted by depressive attributional style and parental anxiety.

Expansion of options for analyzing various aspects of attributional styles is also presented in highly specialized studies. Hawkins & Miller [17] evaluated positive and negative attributional styles, sociotropy, autonomy, and optimism as factors contributing to positive and negative effects. The study found that each attribution style indirectly contributes to depression through optimism. In addition, the negative attribution style directly contributes to psychological stress, as does sociotropy and autonomy.

The study of sports attribution style is presented in Zoljanahi, Mohammadi-Nezhad & Taheri [47]. The results of this study showed a positive significant relationship between sport self-efficacy and sport attribution styles. In addition, sport self-efficacy plays a mediating role between sport attribution styles and creativity. The relationship between implicit beliefs, anxiety, and attributional style in football players was shown in the study by Gardner, Vella & Magee [15]. Essential beliefs were associated with increased anxiety. Incremental beliefs were associated with lower levels of anxiety. Uncontrolled and global attributions mediated the relationship between essential beliefs and anxiety. Controlled and specific attributions mediated the relationship between incremental beliefs and anxiety. Thus, the identification of structural relationships between these variables is very useful for the study and correction of athletes' mental health.

Personality dimensions and attribution styles also have a relationship with the gender dimension. In a study by Khodarahimi, Veiskarami & Bruna [22], it was found that individuals without gender dysphoria had higher

scores on positive attributional style compared to patients with gender dysphoria. There was also a significant effect of gender and ethnicity on personality dimensions, but no effect of gender, ethnicity, or the interaction of ethnicity with gender on attributional styles.

The attributional style is also a leading research focus in schizophrenia, as persecution delusions are assumed to be closely related to attribution. Martin & Penn's [31] study showed that subjects with persecution delusions exhibited a self-serving bias; however, this bias was not unique to individuals with persecution delusions, and it disappeared when independent experts evaluated subjects' causal claims based on a reliable measure of attributional style. Subjects with persecution delusions tended to show a stronger tendency to blame others rather than situations for negative outcomes, and there was a linear relationship between persecution delusions and egoistic attributional style.

Attributions play an important role in depression and paranoia. The attributional style of individuals with psychopathology, unlike healthy individuals, is not a stable trait but depends on recent experiences. Attributional models of depression suggest that a negative attributional style is a vulnerable trait in depression, but there is disagreement about whether attributional style should be assessed for hypothetical or real events. Butters, McClure & Ward [9] show that attributions for real and hypothetical events do not predict a linear unfolding of depressive states: attributions for hypothetical events had a stronger effect on long-term reactions and delayed depression, while attributions for real events had a stronger effect on current reactions. Therefore, attribution of hypothetical events is a major factor in long-term dysphoria, which, according to Weiner [45], is explained by the fact that immediately after the event, a person experiences a primitive emotional reaction that depends on the outcome and attribution: the reaction reflects the outcome, not the cause of the outcome. If the outcome is negative, unexpected, or important, a cause-and-effect relationship is sought, and this relationship affects subsequent emotions and the duration of the depressive reaction. Individuals with an adaptive attributional style experience only short-term dysphoria, while individuals with a depressive attributional style experience permanent dysphoria. Similar results were obtained in the case of paranoid personality disorder. According to Bentall & Kaney [5], the attributional style is more labile in patients with paranoid and depressive disorders than in healthy individuals. Individuals with depressive and paranoid disorders showed increased internalization of hypothetical negative events.

Devyllder, Ben-David, Kimhy & Corcoran [12] studied the externalizing and personalizing dimensions of attributional biases, as well as potential correlations with suspicion and related symptoms, in individuals at clinical risk for psychosis. A biased attributional style in which negative events are attributed to external and personal causes is associated with paranoid delusions in schizophrenia. The authors found that this biased attribution style does not characterize individuals with psychotic tendencies and is not associated with the onset

of paranoid delusions: both patients and controls had a similar externalizing-personalizing attribution style that was not associated with symptoms, including suspicion. Thus, a biased attributional style is probably not a trait that contributes to the onset of paranoid delusions, but is a condition-dependent correlate of paranoid delusions.

Ball, McGuffin, & Farmer [4] argue that attributional style is predominantly a reflection of current mood and does not reflect a risk factor for depression. People with depression tend to attribute internal, stable, and global causes to negative events. The study by Gonzalo, Kleim & Ehlers [16] shows that depressive attribution style is associated with the severity of depression and PTSD symptoms, the number and distress of traumatic experiences, and the frequency of rumination and posttraumatic cognitions. Depressive attributions predicted the severity of PTSD symptoms. Thus, they may be useful in predicting PTSD and should be targeted for psychological treatment of these conditions.

Boyden, Knowles & Rowse [8] conducted a study of the theory of thinking and attributional style in adults, using clinical patients with delusions as an example. Patients with psychotic disorders are characterized by the use of a significant number of atypical explanations for certain situations. Notable are the results obtained by researchers using animated films, which demonstrate significant impairments in the perception of humor against the background of the subjects' attempts to explain jokes (patients with psychotic disorders focus on other aspects of humor in animation than healthy individuals).

Attributional style is also closely related to perceived control and social anxiety. Social anxiety is a persistent, intense, and chronic fear of being negatively judged by others, as well as by oneself, and of being ashamed of one's own actions. Perception of control is the belief that a person can determine their internal state and behavior, influence their environment, and/or achieve desired results. Socially anxious people feel that they lack control over events that affect them. The results of Kaur [21] showed that high levels of social anxiety correlate with a dysfunctional attributional style.

Rumination is another important component of attributional style and a cognitive risk factor for depression, which is receiving increasing attention in the literature. Rumination is a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy associated with depression [10]. According to Nolen-Hoeksema's theory of response style, rumination is defined as a way of thinking that involves repetitive and passive focus on the symptoms of depression, as well as on the causes and consequences of these symptoms. The theory suggests that people have dispositional differences in how they respond to states of negative mood, and those who respond to depressive mood with constant rumination tend to have more persistent and severe depressive episodes. On the contrary, responses that serve to distract a person from a depressive mood are considered to alleviate feelings of sadness (Wang J., Wang X., McWhinnie [44]). Experimental studies have shown that rumination (compared to distraction) increases negative mood states, improves negative thinking and memory, and impairs

social problem solving in individuals with dysphoria (Lyubomirsky & Tkach [29]). However, no such effects were observed among individuals without dysphoria, suggesting that it is the combination of dysphoria and chewing that contributes to the negative effects.

Somewhat opposite to the inherently negative phenomenon of rumination is the related but optimistic «impostor phenomenon» – a parameter describing people characterized by a selfless attributional bias toward success. Ibrahim, Göddertz & Herzberg [20] conducted an experimental study of selfless attributional bias within the impostor phenomenon and its relationship to fixed mindset. The results showed that impostor expression mitigates the effect of feedback on the locus of causality and stability attribution. «Impostors demonstrate an externally unstable style of attribution of success and an internally stable style of attribution of failure. Thus, the connection between impostor expression and its characteristic attributional patterns has been experimentally confirmed.

Other studies of attributional styles are also noteworthy, particularly in the field of clinical practice. According to the results of the study by van den Bogaard, Nijman & Embregts [6], attribution styles differ significantly for aggressive, self-harming, and sexualized defiant behavior. Caregivers of the elderly are characterized by certain specific attribution styles, including manipulation and illness/stress attribution [11].

Yue, Zhou & Liu [46] studied the impact of attributional behavior on the development of energy-saving behavior in political discourse (i.e., how different groups of people respond to government intervention policies on energy saving). The results show that the level of understanding, support, and implementation of energy saving policies among city residents is controversial, and the understanding, support, and implementation of energy saving policies have significant differences in the style of attribution of behavioral outcomes by society.

#### **Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research.**

Attributional styles in general are a thorough field for psychological research, and allow us to study different age, social, professional and other groups, determining the specific attributional style of certain defined groups, summarizing the actual problematic aspects of the mental activity of members of such groups, outlining possible emotional or cognitive disorders, describing certain distinctive neoplasms associated with the specifics of the groups under study. At present, the attributional styles of internally displaced persons or refugees in connection with the war may be of future scientific interest; studies of the dynamics of changes in the attributional styles of persons who have been negatively affected by the war to varying degrees will also be of great scientific importance. In our opinion, it is the study of attributional styles that makes it possible to visualize the general and specific types of a person's response to certain situations, and, as a result, to highlight problem areas in the mental health of the groups under study. The results of the study of attributional styles, thus, provide a primary generalized picture of the elements of the mental state of a person and make it possible to develop a specialized system of psychological diagnosis of an individual.

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