

RESEARCH REPORT

ABSTRACT

**CONSEQUENCES AND CORRELATES OF
ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE AMONG BICOLANAS;
DELINEATING THE IMPACT OF COGNITIONS**

Freddie R. Obligacion

Adopting attribution theory which deals with people's perceptions of causation, this study, utilizing questionnaires, proposed a causal model of personal powerlessness among 620 Bicolanas. Through path analysis, this investigation demonstrated that personal powerlessness-- the belief that outcomes are contingent on external forces beyond one's control--generates a sequelae of maladaptive cognitions, namely, low self-esteem, low success expectancies, and a weak motivation for self-improvement, respectively. Despite the patriarchal ideology dominating Philippine society and the experience of widespread poverty and unrelenting natural calamities, however, respondents exhibited self-efficacy, high self-esteem, and strong propensity for self-improvement, albeit expressing low success expectancies. Significant correlates of these positive orientations include a deep religiosity, high educational attainment, a strong interest in continuing education, and a strong social support system. However, in view of Bicolanas' low success expectations, minimal leadership experience, and a lack of exposure to feminist ideas, changes in socialization patterns alongside cognitive modification may be still be needed to further enhance Bicolanas' self-efficacy.

CONSEQUENCES AND CORRELATES OF ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE AMONG BICOLANAS; DELINEATING THE IMPACT OF COGNITIONS

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Noting that the social condition of women is generally one of subordination to men through economic, political, social, and psychological means (Collier 1982), this researcher began with the notion that women respond to this subordination with an attributional style characterized by powerlessness, helplessness, or hopelessness (Ferguson & Johnson 1990). This supposition yielded the following questions: What are the attitudinal consequences of the attributional style called personal powerlessness, defined essentially as the subjective perception of the environment as uncontrollable by any but external forces such as luck, fate, chance, or powerful others over which the actor has no control (Ball 1965)? What are the correlates of such a belief that everyday events are caused by external forces beyond one's control?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Attribution theorists, dealing with "why" questions or the relationship between phenomena (effects) and the reasons (responsible agents) for those events (Weiner, 1972), would note that personal powerlessness contains the attributional dimensions of Rotter's (1966) concept of locus (external vs. internal locus of control) and controllability (controllable vs. uncontrollable). The personal pow-

erlessness construct can thus be construed as an attributional style (Abramson et al. 1978) which suggests consistencies and common tendencies in the manner people explain to themselves why events happen (Gardner et al. 1959) People's attributional styles can have important personal consequences (Taylor 1989) which are delineated in Atkinson's (1964) attribution model of achievement motivation and Weiner's (1972) general attribution model of action. Atkinson argued that people with high achievement needs are more likely to attribute success to ability and effort. This particular kind of attribution yields a more positive affect for success which, in turn, increases success expectancies, and the probability of achievement behavior. Weiner (1972), for his part, argued that attributions determine achievement-related affects (pride or shame) and expectancies of success which, in turn, influence the subsequent response.

While models such as those of Weiner and Atkinson have been posited theoretically, more studies providing empirical support for such formulations are needed. The scarcity becomes more pronounced as one examines Third World literature. In fact, extant literature reveals a preponderance of descriptive, correlational, and experimental studies employing correlations, analysis of variance, regression analysis, and factor analysis. By proposing causal models of personal powerlessness and presenting primary data analyzed through path analysis, this research aimed to fill in existing substantive and methodological lacunae. Further, the research's focus on a developing country makes it a pioneering effort in its use of attributional processes to explain the dynamics of personal powerlessness in the Third World.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attributional and locus of control research can be divided into those with a sociological and psychological focus. Although

Seeman (1983) observed that most powerlessness studies have been essentially psychological, he noted that the powerlessness construct recurs under varied names in specifically sociological literature such as Sennett and Cobb's (1972) "hidden injuries" which refers to a sensed absence of control among the working class and Portes' (1971) "system blame" which is the tendency to blame the system rather than oneself or fate for one's deprivations, in the area of social-political action, internality has been associated with the propensity to take action (Gore & Rotter 1963). The literature on community organizations in both developed and developing countries has shown the efficacy-enhancing impact of organizational involvement (Dionisio 1991), particularly active participation during meetings (Mathiason 1972). Further, Winter (1973) who observed that politically-inclined organizations were more effective training grounds for self-efficacy than were the more recreationally-oriented or "clubhouse"-type of associations. Leadership opportunities provided through participation in organizations have been shown to enhance self-efficacy as well (Muller-Deham 1957; Hart 1980; Galbraith 1983; Scott 1991).

Self-efficacy has been also associated with the espousal of a feminist ideology. Women who held nontraditional sex-role attitudes possessed self-perceptions and behaved in ways consistent with self-efficacy such as having higher self-esteem (Walstedt 1977; Cott 1975), showing greater independence (Walstedt 1977), demonstrating greater assertiveness (Mainiero 1977), exercising greater control over their bodies through successful contraception (Fox 1977), and possessing less vulnerability to depression (Baucom 1983).

Researchers have likewise correlated personal powerlessness with socioeconomic status (Kohn 1969; Gans 1982; Berglas 1986), poverty, low educational attainment (Jessor et al. 1968), membership in a minority group (Lefcourt 1976; Gans 1982), old age (Lesnoff-Caravaglia 1984), single blessedness (Lerner 1986), and minimal social support (Vanfossen 1986).

Variables related to religion appear to impact on personal powerlessness as well. For example, membership in a religious denomination can encourage certain values and attitudes consistent with self-efficacy (Featherman 1971). Moreover, Sered (1992) observed that women who believed in an omniscient and omnipotent God possessed a fatalistic attitude toward life, a view supported by Manglapus (1965). In contrast, others contend that faith can be empowering (Elhard 1968; Smith 1949; Arboleda 1993).

The psychological literature on personal powerlessness may be classified according to six thematic concentrations, namely, attributional styles of the sexes, response to aversive events, psychopathology, response to social influences, cognitive activity, and achievement behavior. Women's attributions have been noted to be more external than men's (Deaux & Emswiller 1974), although this pattern of general externality may not be a simple one (Frieze et al. 1978). For instance, modesty, fear of social rejection, and "fear of success" (Horner 1968) may mediate the external attributions of some women.

The belief that aversive events are inescapable can yield untoward consequences (Davison & Valins 1969) such as "learned helplessness" (Seligman 1975). Related psychopathological studies reveal that an external locus of control is associated with a predominance of negative affective experiences such as depression and tension (Blechman 1984).

The social influence literature reveals that, in general, externals are more attentive and more positively responsive to the presence of social cues than are internals (Lefcourt 1976). Further, the literature on cognitive activity indicates that internals are quicker at extracting cues that facilitate accurate judgments than are externals (Lefcourt 1976).

Of greatest relevance to this study is the literature on achievement behavior which indicates an association between internality and high achievement, controlling for IQ and cognitive impulsiv-

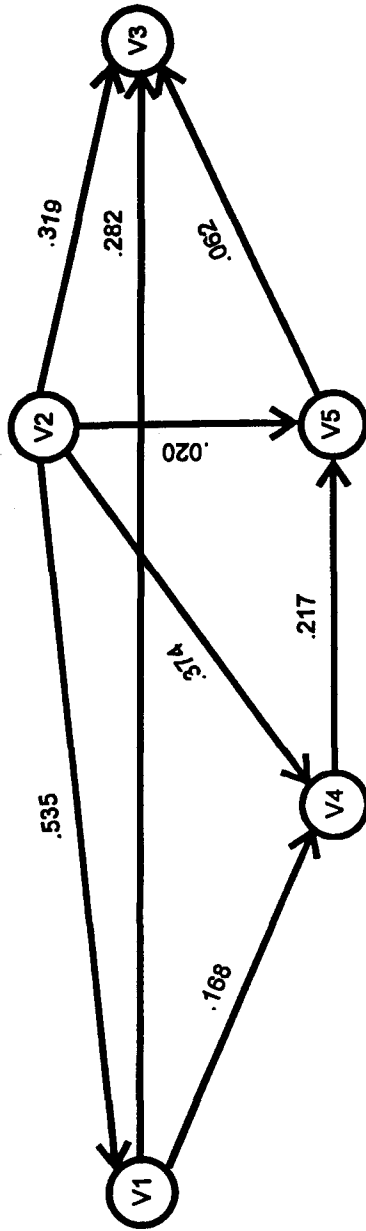
ity (Lefcourt 1976). Internality has also been noted to generate higher self-esteem, greater motivation, higher expectations, and greater persistence (Weiner 1972; Atkinson 1964; Anderson 1974; Feather 1966; Taylor 1989; Marone 1992). Weiner and Atkinson provide a general context for these numerous findings by contending that attributions yield affective and expectancy effects which, in turn, influence responses, attitudes, and perceptions.

METHODOLOGY

Models and Instruments

Guided by Weiner's and Atkinson's models of motivation and performance, this writer proposed a core model of personal powerlessness (Figure 1). Consistent with the model-building approach of Kohn (1983) and the supposition that, aside from personal factors, an action outcome is dependent upon environmental forces (Heider 1958), the core model was then expanded through the introduction of exogenous variables which have been previously identified by the literature as correlating significantly with personal powerlessness (see Figure 2, for a typical expanded model). Guided by previous research, the following factors were hypothesized to aggravate personal powerlessness and its consequent conditions: low educational attainment, few skills, lack of interest in continuing education; minimal continuing education efforts, low SES, weak social support, a strong reliance on divine intervention, a strong spiritual orientation, membership in the Catholic church, minimal leadership experiences, membership in "club-house, old-guard" variety of organizations, lack of interest in and lack of awareness of women's groups and their objectives; and minimal participation in forums or meetings. The fits of the models were determined by Bentler's (1992) EQS path analysis program.

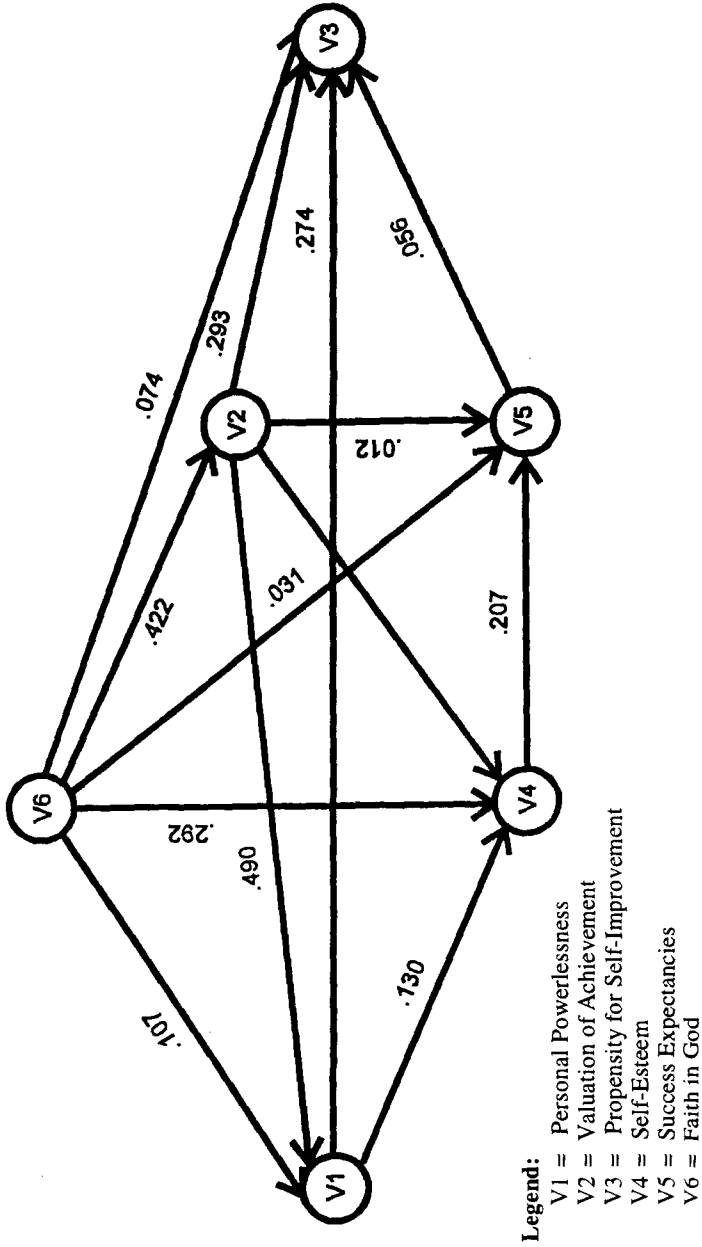
Figure 1. Standardized Coefficients: Core Model;
 Chi-Square = 0.253, df = 1, Probability (p) = 0.615



Legend:

- V1 = Personal Powerlessness
- V2 = Valuation of Achievement
- V3 = Propensity for Self-Improvement
- V4 = Self-Esteem
- V5 = Success Expectancies

**Figure 2: Standardized Coefficients Expanded Model
(Faith in God as Exogenous Variable)
Chi-Square = 1.285, df = 1, p = 0.257**



The five variables in the core model (see Table 1 for correlation matrix) were measured by original scales constructed by this researcher, namely, the Culture-Sensitive Personal Powerlessness Scale (CSPPS), the Valuation of Achievement Scale (VAS), the Success Expectancies Scale (SCXS), the Self-Esteem Scale (SES), and the Propensity for Self-Improvement Scale (PSIS). Two variables in the expanded model, namely, reliance on divine intervention and spiritual vs. material orientation were measured through this author's Faith-in-God Scale (FIGS) and the Other-Worldly Orientation Scale (OWOS). In constructing the scale items, the author carefully integrated relevant localisms, folk sayings, proverbs, popular Biblical passages, and folk knowledge. These scales, prepared in English and Bicol, (Original Scales used in the Study, p. 94 for the English version) showed internal consistencies ranging from Cronbach's alpha 0.76 to 0.89.

The Setting

The selection of the Bicol Region, located in the southeastern tip of Luzon, as study site was based on the well-established linkage between personal powerlessness and poverty (e.g., Lewis 1959; Steinberg 1966; Gonzalez 1977; Pineda 1981). Despite its richness in natural resources such as fishing grounds, abundant mineral resources and fertile soil complemented by its proximity to urban centers such as Metro-Manila and Cebu, the peninsula registers a 73% poverty incidence which is the highest in the country (Bicol University Development Foundation Inc. a.k.a. BUDFI 1990). As if poverty and its ilk were not enough, the region has been plagued by natural calamities and a persistent insurgency problem. In particular, the province of Albay, the actual research site, has cyclically sustained considerable damage from eruptions of Mayon Volcano and has to continuously confront the ravages of typhoons which average three a year (BUDFI 1990).

With the objective of capturing a wide range of socioeconomic conditions, the writer chose Albay as the research focus in the light

Table 1
Correlations, Means, Standard Deviation: The Core Model

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Personal Powerlessness	1.00				
2. Achievement Valuation	.535**	1.00			
3. Propensity for Self-Improvement	.471**	.484**	1.00		
4. Self-Esteem	.366**	.463**	.255**	1.00	
5. Success Expectancies	.301**	.233**	.221**	.303**	1.00
Mean	39.134	42.239	25.481	42.574	12.155
Standard Deviation	4.065	4.673	3.814	5.665	3.809

Legend:

** Significant at the .01 level

of research documenting a wide variability in poverty incidence obtaining in its different municipalities (BUDFI 1990). The municipalities of Polangui, Guinobatan, and Camalig were chosen as sample sources because it represented low (Polangui) and average (Guinobatan and Camalig) degrees of poverty, respectively (BUDFI 1990).

Sampling

The final sample of 620 Bicolanas was obtained using a purposive, multi-stage sampling strategy. Initially, barangays with low and high poverty incidences were identified. Barangays reflecting sharply contrasting socioeconomic statuses were then purposively chosen. Lists of female residents 18 years or older were prepared and individual respondents picked through the interval sampling technique.

FINDINGS

Respondents' Profile

About 75% of the respondents, whose average age was 36, categorized themselves as living in poverty. Ninety percent went through elementary school, with 30% having some college education. Eighty percent expressed willingness to find time to attend continuing education classes. Overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, 99% expressed having attended religious services in varying frequencies, while only 2% considered religious beliefs unimportant. Relatedly, the women expressed a strong belief in the power of divine intervention and espoused a spiritual as opposed to a materialistic or worldly orientation. Of the 80% reporting memberships in various organizations, 52% belonged to mainly recreational clubs, while 48% were affiliated with associations with a political or social mission. However, less than 20% declared having assumed lead-

ership roles in their respective organizations and 58% were not aware of the feminist movement. During crises, 95% indicated the existence of support systems they could depend on for assistance.

In regard to the variables in the proposed models, the women showed self-efficacy (an average category score of 4.37 out of 5.00 as the most self-efficacious) rather than personal powerlessness, a strong motivation for self-improvement (4.25), a high regard for achievement (4.32), and high self-esteem (3.87). Success expectancies, however, were relatively low (2.02).

Model Estimates

The EQS estimation of the core model yielded an excellent fit which suggests that the model reproduced the observed covariances among the variables with precision. This excellent fit was indicated by the chi-square value of 0.253 (degree of freedom=1) with a probability $p=0.61$ and fit indices ranging from 1.00 to 1.01. No linear dependency among the parameters was noted; the residual plot was very symmetric; and the covariance residuals were very small--all indicators of adequate specification.

The introduction of exogenous variables in the core model produced expanded models of adequate specification (note p -values in Table 2). Among the exogenous variables incorporated in the expanded model, the following factors diminished personal powerlessness directly (Table 2): high educational attainment, possession of skills, awareness of government agencies, continuing education efforts such as attendance of seminars and monitoring self-improvement programs on radio and television, leadership experience, a greater number of leadership positions, a strong faith in God, a deep spiritual orientation, and being Roman Catholic. Further, mediated by the variable valuation of achievement, the following reduced personal powerlessness in an indirect manner (Table 2): frequent attendance of religious services, awareness of the women's movement, reading, a strong interest in continuing edu-

Table 2
Unstandardized Path Coefficients for Exogenous
Variables Incorporated into the Core Model

Exogenous Variables	Core Model Variables:					Chi-Square	df	p
	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5			
With Significant, Direct effects on V1:								
1. Educational Attainment	.192*	.357*	.027	.228*	.741*	.256	1	.613
2. Number of Skills	.234*	.258*	.136	.246*	.357*	.345	1	.557
3. Awareness of Government Agencies	.070*	.063*	.041*		.047*	.427	2	.808
4. Importance Given to Continuing Education	.282*	.799*	.352*	.226	1.113*	.196	1	.658
5. Attendance of Seminars	.312*			.496*	.603*	.457	3	.928
6. Monitoring Self-Improvement Programs	.277*	.542*	.248*	.100	.679*	.217	1	.642
7. Leadership Experience	.242*				.546*	2.35	4	.671
8. Number of Leadership Positions	.191*		.201*		.419*	1.66	3	.658
9. Faith in God	.104*	.470*	.068*	.394*	.028*	1.28	1	.257
10. Spiritual Orientation	.167*	.371*	.041*	.287*	.096*	.727	1	.394
11. Roman Catholicism	1.250*					4.78	5	.443
With Significant, Indirect effects on V1:								
1. Attendance of Religious Services	.043	.581*	.134	.223	.546*	.267	1	.605
2. Awareness of the Women's Movement	.456	.973*	.066	1.030*	2.007*	.265	1	.607
3. Reading	.181	.453*	.232	.245	1.228*	.219	1	.640
4. Interest in Continuing Education	.153	.603*	.148	.260	.746*	.269	1	.604
5. Social Support System	.058	.386*	.163		.236	.239	2	.887
6. Seeking Assistance from Government Agencies	-.002	.328*	.031	.216*	.347*	.280	1	.597

Legend:

- * Significant at the .05 level
- V1 = Personal Powerlessness
- V2 = Valuation of Achievement
- V3 = Propensity for Self-Improvement
- V4 = Self-esteem
- V5 = Success Expectancies
- df = degrees of freedom
- p = Chi-Square probability

cation, an extensive social support system, and seeking assistance from government agencies.

DISCUSSION

The Respondents' Attributional Style

Contrary to the hypothesis that the respondents' attributional style would lean toward personal powerlessness as a result of poverty (Lewis 1961) and subordination (Ferguson & Johnson 1990), the respondents' overall attributional style tended to be one of self-efficacy. This finding resonates with ethnographic research documenting Southeast Asian women's active involvement in farming, trading, family business, and household affairs (Sobritchea 1990). In the Philippines, both traditional values and modern civil law support women's involvement in the social and economic life of the community over and above her domestic activities (Fox 1965). A culture which perpetuates this type of values and laws may be a culture whose overarching theme is not gender but whose hierarchical system is encoded by rank, birth order, and spiritual potency (Atkinson & Errington 1990).

Congruent with the respondents' high self-efficacy, propensity for self-improvement, and self-esteem scores is the characterization of the Bicolana as hardworking, strong where her male counterpart would break, and a hard-headed realist where her male counterpart would flinch. The Bicolana makes an awesome matriarch who calls the shots and feels a strong sense of responsibility for everyone who seeks refuge in her home (Polotan 1967). She is not wanting in managerial acumen and aggressiveness, although she may have a deeply conservative streak (Mercado 1966).

However, despite the dominant perception that Filipino women enjoy a parity of status with men (Licuanan 1991), Filipino society

is essentially patriarchal as manifested by the dominance of men in almost all areas of life (Sobritchea 1990). As a consequence, Filipino women feel strongly the burden of myriad social problems, the most important of which is poverty (Gonzalez 1977), a possible consequence of which is a low expectancy of success as revealed by this study. Interestingly, Gonzalez noted that her respondents felt that their problems were caused by external conditions beyond their control and expressed a lack of faith in the government's ability to ameliorate existing conditions but ironically believed in the importance of personal striving.

The paradoxical co-existence of self-efficacy, personal powerlessness, and low success expectancies seem to indicate that Bicolanas, in particular, and Filipinas, in general, are situated in a milieu operating on two contradictory ideologies. One ideology, which supposedly places Filipino women on a pedestal, provides the veneer of equality between the sexes and the encouragement of women's accomplishments. The second, patriarchy, determines the rules of the achievement game and imposes ceilings on how far women can go. Filipino-style patriarchy appears to send conflicting messages to Filipinas which read something like this: Yes, we appreciate women's strivings, but such strivings should not exceed men's. Yes, we welcome female leaders but we expect them to have a demeanor befitting women subscribing to male-authored traditional scripts.

Attitudinal Consequences of Personal Powerlessness

Results supported the cognitive models of Weiner (1972) and Atkinson (1964). By demonstrating the significant impact of personal powerlessness as an attributional style on perceptions and attitudes, this investigation underscores the importance of the mediating influence of cognitive representation which bridges the stimulus situation and the consequent behavior or attitude.

Consistent with Weiner and Atkinson's proposition that attributions can have affective consequences, this study showed how

personal powerlessness generates low self-esteem. Apparently, individuals feel the greatest pride when they overcome personal shortcomings by hard work or effort which are factors within one's control. Conversely, personal powerlessness leads people to feel useless or think that they are no good at all at times. Unable to provide positive feedback to themselves when the environment is indifferent or oppositional, their capacity to move ahead is seriously curtailed (Anderson 1974).

Not only does attributional style determine affect; it influences expectancies as well. Consistent with the propositions of Atkinson and Weiner, if a woman attributes a successful outcome to luck, an uncontrollable external factor, her future success expectancies will not increase. On the other hand, if she attributes success to skill or effort, which are controllable factors, her expectancies will increase.

Supporting Atkinson's sequelae, this investigation further showed that success expectancies, in turn, impact on people's motivation for self-improvement. This finding is consistent with research indicating that the expectancy effect can be observed on people who have been led to believe they will do well or poorly in future tasks independent of their past performance levels, controlling for history of success (Feather 1966).

Aside from affecting success expectancies and affective outcomes, attributions have been shown by this study to directly impact the motivation for self-improvement. Taylor (1989) observed that the most dramatic effects of a belief in personal control concern motivation to perform tasks and persistence at these tasks. People who have positive views of themselves attempt tasks that they might otherwise avoid and work harder and longer on these tasks. The perseverance and the optimism increases the likelihood that their goals will be attained. Aside from showing a direct link between self-efficacy and motivation for self-improvement, this study also revealed the significant mediating influences of self-esteem and success expectancies. In this regard, Taylor (1989) ob-

served further that people with high self-esteem evaluate their performance more positively than those with low self-esteem even when their performance is actually of the same quality. This combination of positive evaluation performance and optimism can, in turn, enhance motivation.

Still in agreement with Atkinson's model, this research found valuation of achievement as the single most potent predictor of personal powerlessness. Individuals who value achievement highly are more likely to engage in achievement-oriented tasks than are individuals who hold low achievement valuations because the former experience greater positive affect for success as a result of attributing success to effort, a factor which is deemed to be under the control of individuals. The greater positive affect for success, in turn, results in high success expectancies even following failure. High success expectancies consequently lead to a higher probability of achievement-oriented behavior (Weiner 1972).

To summarize, an attributional style which hinges on a lack of belief in personal control generates self-defeating attitudes and affect (Marone 1992) such as low self-esteem, low success expectations, and maintenance of the status quo through lack of initiative or procrastination. The individual with a sense of personal powerlessness faces obstacles with negative self-talk, decreased effort, and lack of strategic planning. On the other hand, an attributional style which thrives on self-efficacy exemplified by the Bicolana respondents, yields highly adaptive attitudes and affect such as high sense of self-worth, optimism, and a strong motivation to pursue goals.

Correlates of Personal Powerlessness

Attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions do not arise from a vacuum. In discussing personal powerlessness as interacting with social structure in its various manifestations such as religious institutions, the educational system, the economic hierarchy, secondary groups, and

social networks, this section will present factors associated with the Bicolanas' reported perceptions.

Religiosity

Next to achievement valuation, a strong confidence in divine intervention and a spiritual orientation yielded the strongest significant, positive, and direct effects on both personal powerlessness and achievement valuation. This powerful influence of religious beliefs on the Bicolana is consistent with her characterization as being deeply religious (Polotan 1967). The observed directions of the influence of religious beliefs, however, did not conform to the hypothesized directions. Initially, following the arguments of Sered (1992) and Manglapus (1965), this writer posited that reliance on any form of divine intervention implies surrendering or entrusting one's life to a power greater than one's own, thus, attenuating the individual's perception of control over outcomes. Further, this writer originally hypothesized that a person's belief in the superiority of spiritual goals over material goals will likewise decrease a person's perception of control over outcomes because this person will tend to consider worldly accomplishments or gains as ephemeral and insignificant relative to the rewards to be reaped in the after-life.

There exists, however, a school of thought which proposes that faith and self-efficacy are not incompatible. For instance, Elhard (1968) said that even the most theocentric versions of faith concede some response, some measure of mastery by a man in his own destiny because response is inseparable from the human identity. That faith is empowering is also contended by Smith (1949) who asserts that having faith allows people to tap into the spiritual world which generates creativity, purpose, and power not only to live one's own life, but also to become creator, purposer, and power-giver himself. By believing that a most powerful Other is with them while coping with the problems of life, women of faith are armed with the mere knowledge that one does not suffer alone--a very

effective coping mechanism. And if that Other is considered omniscient, then, a feeling of confidence is generated in that person (Arboleda 1993).

Closely related to faith is spiritual orientation which this research has shown to be efficacy-enhancing. This finding suggests that people who believe that there is more to life than material reality have access to meanings that material values cannot provide (Smith 1949). The awareness of transcendent realities provide them a "reason" for their trials and inner satisfactions which material values cannot provide. When individuals' needs for the transcendent are satisfied, they manage to focus their inner resources and thus become less vulnerable to and are more optimistic in facing the vicissitudes of life (Schuller 1985).

Aside from faith and spiritual orientation, the other religious variable which affected personal powerlessness directly was religious denomination. Roman Catholic respondents reported higher self-efficacy levels relative to their non-Catholic counterparts. A possible explanation for this finding comes from Featherman (1971) who found evidence that Catholics, like Jews, show positive motivations toward work as having instrumental or extrinsic value. In so far as work connotes action as opposed to inaction and that self-efficacy refers to a belief in the potency of one's actions, an argument can be made for a link between religious beliefs and self-efficacy. Alternatively, since Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion in the Philippines, it can be contended that mere membership in a dominant group encourages a sense of mastery (Lefcourt 1976).

Being a member of a religious denomination implies participation in this denomination's rituals and traditions (Miller 1981), a supposition supported by the finding that less than 1% of the respondents signified not having attended any religious services at all. The cognitive impact of such participation is underscored by the finding that frequent attendance of religious services signifi-

cantly increased self-efficacy levels indirectly through the mediation of the respondents' attitudes toward achievement. Apparently, participation in group worship brings people into the symbolic frame that governs communal existence, thus potentially influencing personal attitudes, dispositions, and proclivities toward action (Miller 1981).

Social Class

Consistent with Lefcourt's (1976) characterization of the poor as abjectly helpless and in despair, the expanded model showed how the respondents' social class directly affected personal powerlessness. Accounting for this phenomenon, Lefcourt (1976) stated that to people who continuously live in adverse circumstances as is the case for the majority of the respondents, life is subject to external forces beyond their control. In stark contrast, property or wealth accords an aspect of authority and a certainty of purpose (Galbraith 1983). The wealthy, which constituted a very small percentage of the respondents, derive a sense of pleasure and happiness from their exercise of power which provide them opportunities to control valued resources. It is evident, therefore, that those so positioned in society to secure for themselves the social desiderata are more likely to possess self-efficacy than those in positions of disadvantage (Jessor et al. 1968).

Moreover, by demonstrating that women with high SES have significantly higher self-esteem, higher success expectancies, and stronger motivation to improve themselves than their counterparts who have less in life, this study has reinforced the well-documented connection between social class and mental health or self-satisfaction. In fact, some people refer to power as the "ultimate aphrodisiac" and the "most effective short-range antidepressant in the world" (Berglas 1986).

It is noteworthy as well to underscore the finding that social class exhibited a significant positive and indirect effect on achievement valuation as mediated by personal powerlessness. This find-

ing implies, following DeCharms et al.'s (1955) argument that achievement valuation is learned, that membership in a particular social class breeds particular value orientations which, in turn, are engendered by specific family interaction patterns. In this regard, Gans (1982) concluded that family interaction styles vary with social class. For instance, the upper-middle-class pattern is "adult-directed." This pattern emphasizes individual growth and self-development in accordance with the child's individuality. Note that these values are congruent with self-efficacy. On the other hand, the working class' "adult-centered" pattern stresses subordination and obedience — values compatible with personal powerlessness. Similar observations were made by Kohn (1989) who noted that men of higher "social class" position are more likely than are men belonging to a lower "social class" to value self-direction and to harbor self-conceptions and social orientations founded on the belief that self-direction is both possible and efficacious.

Leadership

The finding that Bicolanas with extensive leadership experience, which sadly was a small minority, possessed stronger self-efficacy is consistent with the position that leadership always has individual power as one of its foundations, individual power referring to those qualities which make a person winning, impressive, able to assume command, and to decide (Mueller-Deham 1957). Leadership bestows upon its possessor the prerogative of providing or withholding resources such as money, materials, time, and information (Hart 1980). Instead of being recipients of outcomes contingent upon others' actions, a leader, through his or her personality and position, can win acceptance of their views and visions (Galbraith 1983).

Feminist Awareness

The salience of feminism in the respondents' social-political activities cannot be overemphasized inasmuch as this study showed that the small percentage of the Bicolana respondents who were

aware of the women's movement manifested significantly greater self-efficacy than those who had never heard of the women's movement. This finding suggests that the feminist ideology plays a role in encouraging a greater valuation of one's self, one's potentiality, and one's life (Fox 1977). Further, Bicolanas who showed strong interest in joining or organizing feminist groups exhibited more adaptive attitudes than those who were indifferent to these concerns. Apparently, participation in voluntary organizations with a feminist agenda provides an excellent training ground for effective political participation (Scott 1991).

Knowledge

Consistent with the adage, knowledge is power, findings indicated how personal powerlessness can be diminished by a wide knowledge base which the respondents are fortunate to have. Even if people choose to control their environment or even if others grant them control, individuals cannot experience mastery if they lack the skills and knowledge required in a given situation. Hence, the importance of higher educational aspirations and interest in life-long learning, as expressed by the majority of the respondents, cannot be overemphasized. Learning makes people "masters of their own destiny" (Coady 1950), provides drive, direction, and purpose (Livingstone 1945), and sparks in people a "reconfirmation of the energies of individuality, the power to choose a direction for oneself and to commit one's labor and capital to it as a free and vital being" (De Mott as quoted by Gross 1977).

The kind of continuing education women can undertake can range from attending seminars to activities which can be done right in the home. As this study revealed, reading and monitoring self-improvement programs on the radio and television significantly enhanced the respondents' sense of mastery. It is somehow a consolation to know that strengthening self-efficacy is within reach of the mostly impoverished respondents. Generally, even in the humblest of Bicol abodes in the remotest villages, one can find transis-

torized radios which are virtually the only sources of information and connection with the larger society.

Social Support

By showing that extensive social support networks, such as those of the respondents, significantly enhance self-efficacy and its consequent conditions such as self-esteem, success expectancies, and propensity for self-improvement, this study joins the wide body of literature which has demonstrated the positive effects of social support on mental health (Vanfossen 1986). While the evidence for the adaptive value of social support is overwhelming, it is important to consider that social support can be a source of stress as well (Stein & Rappaport 1986). It appears, however, that having an expanded system of support is a reasonable risk to take in view of the significantly richer payoff in mental health terms.

Summing up

The foregoing section demonstrated that beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes are as much a function of social structure as they are of purely psychological factors. Through ritual and doctrine, the religious institution provides norms and values which influence behaviors and attitudes. By providing information and skills, the educational system and mass media offer multiple perspectives of reality and effectively expand the range of options open to individuals. By providing leadership experiences, secondary groups such as voluntary associations develop managerial acumen which subsequently impacts perceptions people have about themselves. By situating people within a social hierarchy, the stratification system determines access to opportunities which, in turn, molds perceptions and beliefs. By providing emotional and material comfort, social networks effectively contribute to sound mental health.

Situating this summation against the backdrop of the respondents' profile, it can thus be posited that the Bicolanas' high educational attainment, strong interest in life-long education, deep reli-

giosity, and an extensive network of social support may provide clues to their perceived self-efficacy, high self-esteem, and a strong drive for personal development even as they contend with the harsh realities of poverty, natural calamities, and an unstable peace and order situation and even as they deal with the disadvantages of a low level of political participation, relatively minimal leadership experience, and a lack of exposure to feminism.

IMPLICATIONS

How one perceives causation, particularly its controllability and locus, can have self-fulfilling consequences which are consistent with the perception of causation. Personal powerlessness triggers a pernicious sequelae of maladaptive beliefs and attitudes such as a low self-esteem, low success expectancies, and a weak motivation for self-improvement, respectively. Conversely, self-efficacy engenders positive and functional perceptions.

Although respondents in this study reported generally high levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and propensity for self-improvement, Bicolanas can definitely still make some room for improvement considering their low success expectancies. It might be useful to bear in mind the findings that low success expectancies are direct consequences of personal powerlessness and that low success expectancies, in turn, adversely affect a person's motivation for self-improvement. To the extent that such pessimism may weaken Filipino women's resolve to overcome structural obstacles perpetuated by patriarchy, to the extent that a lack of interest in continuous self-development can prevent women from realizing their full potentialities, and to the extent developing countries need the talents and energies of its human resources about half of whom are women (Gonzalez 1977), every effort must be exerted to counteract the debilitating effects of negative expectations. Fortunately, because

personal powerlessness and its consequences appear to be learned within social contexts as suggested by this study, they can be unlearned as well (Seligman 1991) through cognitive modification and resocialization strategies.

Cognitive Modification

Based on the philosophy that the self could improve itself through a self-fulfilling prophecy (Seligman 1991), the cognitive approach aims to identify, challenge, and correct distorted conceptualizations and dysfunctional beliefs or schemata through the process of reattribution. To succeed, women will first have to recognize thoughts related to personal powerlessness, gather evidence which contradicts these thoughts, learn to distract themselves from negative thoughts, and challenge their assumptions about causation which breeds personal powerlessness. Women will need to have more realistic goals, be open to alternative desirable outcomes, and reevaluate unattainable goals (Abramson et al. 1978).

The cognitive approach must be played out in real-world situations which will provide people with experiences and contexts within which they could actually engage in successful response-outcome sequences (Lerner 1986). Abramson and associates (1978) concur by recommending training the necessary skills such as problem-solving skills, social skills, and everyday management skills which Kelley (1983) believes can be learned from observing skilled models, having opportunities to practice response in the real world, and receiving feedback and reinforcements from others. Self-education or continuing education should remain as one of women's top priorities. Aside from making themselves available for seminars and training programs, women need to keep abreast of current events in order to acquire an informed perspective for their struggles. Equipped with the skills acquired in the process, women are more likely to become well-informed, economically independent, and upwardly mobile (Johnson & Ferguson 1990) — attributes favorable to the cultivation of self-efficacy.

Resocialization Strategies

Building social networks for purposes of exercising leadership and active citizenship provides opportunities for women to develop adaptive competencies (Leghorn & Parker 1981). The need to establish linkages for more encompassing social missions among women becomes more urgent in the case of Filipinas whose participation in community and political activities is minimal (Licuanan 1991; Eviota 1979). Lacking time and interest and unaware of the existence of community organizations, Filipinas get together with their neighbors mainly for informal talks and celebrations rather than for community organizing activities (Gonzalez 1977). Evidently, a potential exists to channel this predilection toward the discussion of common concerns affecting the women's daily lives. Whether these concerns are home- or work-related, the women can benefit from mutual support, sharing of information, valuing each other's competence, and providing role models for each other, improved self-image, and political mobilization (Reinharz 1984). This study's finding on the association between self-efficacy and leadership experience suggests that as members of voluntary associations, women should not hesitate to accept positions of leadership and responsibility inasmuch as these are rich opportunities to build self-efficacy and to train for effective political participation on a larger scale.

Guided by this research's finding that cognitions are learned within social milieus, well-meaning Filipinos can strengthen resocialization efforts which will eventually create a more conducive environment for women to develop self-efficacy. In the home, care-givers can reward female competence more frequently (Frieze 1987). Further, a greater caretaking role on the part of male care-givers can give girls more exposure to situations which require analytic thinking (Giele 1978). In schools, teachers should be assisted in enhancing their awareness of their attitudes about appropriate sex-role behaviors and then to sensitize their students and colleagues to bias and stereotyping. Female students, teachers, and

administrators should be encouraged, supported, and trained for nontraditional professions on all levels of the educational system.

Aside from changes in socialization experiences, Parsons et al. (1976) contend that changes in cultural norms, and economic-political realities are necessary to promote change in personal attitudes and beliefs. In this regard, women leaders, using their "legitimate power" as a result of their status, (Osborn & Harris 1975) can strategically "sell" the feminine leadership style which emphasizes sharing of information, cooperation, and communication as opposed to the male values of competition and conquest.

Concluding Notes

That women's accomplishments throughout history have made this world a better place is a compelling reason for continued efforts in creating social arrangements conducive to women's development. Structural changes initiated and sustained by individuals of moral courage coupled with women's commitment and determination will eventually reap for women the rewards of emancipation from the crippling clutches of personal powerlessness and patriarchy.

Original Scales Used in the Study*

Culture-Sensitive Personal Powerlessness Scale (CSPPS)

(Cronbach's alpha=0.82)

1. Most of my achievements have been the result of hard work.
2. My present situation will improve if I work hard.
3. People succeed because of hard work, not because of luck.
4. *Pag may tiyaga, may nilaga.*
5. It is important to set goals in life.
6. To become successful, people must be persistent.
7. My life on earth is determined by fate/destiny.**
8. Success is 90% hard work and 10% luck.
9. Working hard will improve my present situation.
10. I believe I have the power to change my life for the better.

Self-Esteem Scale (SES)

(Cronbach's alpha=0.81)

1. I feel that I am competent in most of the things I do.
2. I feel that I have more strengths than weaknesses.
3. I believe I can contribute something valuable to society.
4. I believe that my being born into this world has a purpose.
5. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
6. Few people can match my accomplishments in the things I do best.
7. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
8. On the whole, I feel satisfied with myself.
9. I am satisfied with what I have done in my life so far.
10. I believe I deserve an award for the good things I have done.
11. I feel that the world is a better place with me living in it.

Valuation of Achievement Scale (VAS)

(Cronbach's alpha=0.87)

1. I would rather work than remain idle.
2. It is important for a person to have ambitions in life.
3. I feel bad if I have not accomplished anything in any given day.

4. Life has no meaning without any accomplishments.
5. I want people to remember me for my accomplishments not for my position in life.
6. I feel good after accomplishing something.
7. I enjoy relaxation/recreation fully only after I have accomplished something important.
8. Accomplishing something increases my self-respect.
9. I work very hard at something until I am satisfied with the results.
10. Life becomes meaningless when a person loses interest in improving his/her situation.

Success Expectancies Scale (SCXS)

(Cronbach's alpha=0.76)

1. What do you think will your situation be in the next 3 years compared to the present?
 - _____ Worse
 - _____ Same as the present/no change
 - _____ Little improvement
 - _____ Average improvement
 - _____ Much better

2. Suppose you are given a chance to enrol in a skills training program, what do you think are your chances of completing this program?
 - _____ No chance of completing this program
 - _____ Small chance of completing this program
 - _____ An average chance of completing this program.
 - _____ A strong chance of completing this program.

3. Suppose you are able to learn a new skill, how much improvement do you think will this new skill bring to your present situation?
 - _____ No improvement
 - _____ A little improvement
 - _____ Average or moderate improvement
 - _____ Much improvement.

4. Suppose a government agency or private organization helps you make a plan to improve your situation, what do you think are the chances that this plan will be successfully implemented?

- No chance of success
- A small chance of success
- An average chance of success
- A great chance of success.

5. How frequently do you experience the fear of failing in the things you do?

- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Never

6. In general, how confident are you about succeeding in the things you do?

- Very confident
- Moderately confident
- Little confidence
- Not confident at all.

Propensity for Self-Improvement Scale (PSIS)

(Cronbach's alpha=0.88)

1. I need to improve myself in order to have a better future.
2. I have a strong desire to improve my present situation.
3. I am willing to put time and effort in improving my situation.
4. Improving my present situation is my most important goal at the moment.
5. I owe it to myself and my loved ones to improve my present situation.
6. I am willing to begin improving my present situation at the earliest possible time.

Faith-in-God Scale (FIGS)

(Cronbach's alpha=0.81)

1. One must not worry about what to eat or drink because God knows our needs.
2. All things eventually turn out well for those who love God.
3. When you believe that you will receive things you ask for, these things will be yours.
4. In times of trouble, God will protect me.
5. We should trust God and not depend on our knowledge.
6. God supplies all our needs.
7. We will survive by trusting in God.

Other-Worldly Orientation Scale (OWOS)

(Cronbach's alpha=0.80)

1. Riches on earth will eventually perish.
2. Spiritual concerns are more important than material concerns.
3. It is very difficult for a rich person to go to heaven.
4. One should not store treasures here on earth but should store treasures in heaven.
5. The poor on this earth will receive their reward in heaven.
6. The meek shall inherit the earth.
7. We should associate with the humble.
8. It is better to lose all material possessions than to lose one's soul.
9. Man does not live by bread alone.
10. I believe that a person should be remembered for his/her good deeds rather than his/her material wealth.

Legend:

*Except for the SCXS, the scales were scored according to the following: Strongly Disagree=0; Disagree=1; Not Sure=2; Agree=3; Strongly Agree=4.

**Scoring for this item was reversed, i.e. Strongly Disagree=4; Disagree=3, etc.

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