A Meta-Analysis of Self-Attributions Following Three Types of Trauma: Sexual Victimization, Illness, and Injury

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Victim self-attributions (e.g., that one caused an event or was responsible for its occurrence) have been frequently discussed in the trauma literature. However, little empirical work has sought to test the extant theoretical models conceptualizing why self-attributions occur. We investigated by meta-analysis the prevalence and predictors of self-attributions following three commonly studied traumatic events: sexual victimization, illness, and severe injury, in an attempt to identify predictors of self-attributions and examine extant theoretical models. Results supported that self-attribution, while not uncommon, is not the modal response to trauma. Indeed, when the level of self-attribution was compared to that predicted by chance responding, self-attributions occurred at levels much lower than chance. In addition, partial support was found for the extant theoretical models, but no one model could explain the entire pattern of findings. Implications of these results for future empirical and theoretical work are discussed.