This Week's Citation Classic

Christopher Peterson
Department of Psychology
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1346

In 1978, I received my PhD in social/personality psychology at the University of Colorado, where I studied with a number of researchers interested in attitudes and cognitive style. Questionnaire construction and scale development were ingrained in all of the Colorado students. So too were the more mundane aspects of this sort of research; we used to joke that our doctorates should really be in collating and stapling.

After teaching social psychology for several years, I went to the University of Pennsylvania to respecialize in clinical psychology. Marty Seigman was kind enough to sponsor me and open the necessary doors. I took courses in testing, psychopathology, and therapy. I completed a practicum and internship at the Philadelphia Veterans Administration Medical Center. Of course I was grateful for these opportunities, so I offered to help out with the research activities of Marty's lab.

Marty had been conducting learned helplessness experiments since the middle 1960s, first with animals and then with people. Researchers at Pennsylvania did not usually work this way, so there was an obvious niche for me to fill. I can remember wandering about the Psychology Department with a handful of IBM cards asking people where the campus computer center was. No one could tell me! I ended up analyzing data at nearby Drexel University.

Our 1982 article describing the ASQ simply presented the questionnaire and some of its psychometric properties. Our goal in publishing the article was to make the ASQ more available to the research community. It never occurred to us at the time that the article would someday be considered a Citation Classic®. But why not? Learned helplessness continued to be a topic of great research interest, particularly its application to depression. The ASQ provides the researcher with an inexpensive and straightforward way to investigate helplessness ideas, and its role in making possible diverse lines of research has been great.