GOT MY MIND SET ON YOU: HOW PARENTAL IMPLICIT THEORIES INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS, EVALUATIONS, AND DISCIPLINARY REACTIONS TO CHILD TRANSGRESSIONS

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OVERVIEW

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According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (2012):

- Approximately 686,000 US children were victims of child maltreatment.
  - The most prevalent forms of child maltreatment were neglect (78.3%) and physical abuse (18.3%).
  - The majority (81.5%) of these child victims were maltreated by at least one parent.

- While overall rates of child maltreatment have declined, research suggests that rates of child physical abuse and neglect remain unchanged (Finkelhor, Joes, & Shattuck, 2009).
CHILD MALTREATMENT

- Abused children are more likely to have both physical and psychological problems (e.g., Hussey, Chang, & Kotch, 2006).

- In 2008 the US spent over $124 billion on child maltreatment cases (Fang, Brown, Florence, & Mercy, 2012).

- While the need to intervene is clear, unfortunately the efficacy of interventions aimed at preventing future physical abuse perpetration has been largely disappointing (Chaffin & Friedrich, 2004).

  - Existing interventions are often atheoretical and fail to take into account evidence-based models of child physical abuse (CPA).
Milner’s (2003) four-stage social information processing (SIP) model of child physical abuse (CPA) asserts that parental cognitions and attributions may augment the risk of aggressive reactions to child behaviors.

- Pre-existing schemata that influence child-rearing
- Stage 1: Biased Perceptions
  - Encode child behaviors more negatively (e.g., Crouch et al., 2010).
- Stage 2: Distorted Interpretations, Attributions, and Evaluations
  - Attribute more internal, global, and stable attributions to child transgressions (e.g., Montes, de Paul, & Milner, 2001).
- Stage 3: Faulty Information Integration
  - Fail to integrate mitigating information when making attributions about child behavior (e.g., De Paúl et al., 2006).
- Stage 4: Response Implementation and Monitoring
  - More use of power assertion strategies and less use of inductive strategies (e.g., Chilamkurti & Milner, 1993).
Numerous studies have provided support for the various stages of the SIP model of CPA. However, little research focusing on pre-existing schemata that influence child-rearing has been conducted.

Additional research is needed to identify the global cognitive schemata that influence distorted cognitive processes and aversive disciplinary reactions (Milner, 2003).

Implicit theories are one type of global schema that have been empirically shown to provide a processing framework that influences cognitions and behaviors (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995).
Implicit theories are the core beliefs an individual holds about the nature of human attributes as being malleable (incremental mindset) or fixed (entity mindset) that subsequently guide individual perceptions, inferences, evaluations, and reactions, especially during aversive events and situations (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995).

- The type of implicit theory that a person holds (i.e., entity versus incremental) provides a framework for the manner in which social information is processed and understood, and has been found to predict different patterns of judgments, attributions, and reactions to social behaviors.

- High entity, in comparison to low entity (incremental), theory individuals are more likely to assign trait judgments, attribute hostile intent, feel more negative affect, and react aggressively to others (e.g., Yeager, Trzesniewski, Nokelainen, & Dweck, 2011).
While the relevance of implicit theories have been examined in the domains of shyness (Valentiner, Mounts, Drik & Grier-Lonsway, 2011), intelligence (Blackwell, Trzesniewski Dweck, 2007), personality (Erdley, Cain, Loomis, Dumas-Hines, & Dweck, 2007), and relationships (Rudolph, 2009), no research to date has explored the applicability of this theory to the parenting domain.

Implicit theory interventions have been found to be effective in altering maladaptive cognitions and behaviors (Yeager, Miu, Powers, & Dweck, 2013).

This study seeks to advance our understanding of the relationships between implicit theories and parental cognitions and behaviors in response to child misbehavior.
PILOT STUDY--METHODOLOGY

- Demographics
- Child Abuse Potential Inventory (Milner, 1986)
  - Random Response Validity Index
- Participants
  - Initial sample: 212 parents
    - Reasons for exclusions:
      - Random response on CAP ($n = 14$)
      - Missing data exceeded 10% ($n = 9$)
  - Final sample: 189 parents retained
    - 56.3% were mothers, and 39.1% were fathers
    - 75.6% of respondents were Caucasian.
    - The mean age of respondents was 35.4 years ($SD = 9.5$).
    - 86.6% of respondents had received at least some college education.
    - 87.1% were married or cohabitating, 7.6% were single, and 4.6% were divorced, separated, or widowed.
    - No significant differences between low entity and high entity parents were observed on any of the demographic variables.
Implicit Theories of General Personality (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997)

- Eight items (4 entity and 4 incremental)
  - Six-point likert scale ranging from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 6 “Strongly Agree”
  - Incremental theory items were reverse scored
  - Internal consistency was good (Cronbach’s alpha, .93) and consistent with prior research using this measure (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997).

Mean response across items was used to classify respondents as either:
- High entity (mean response > 3), \( n = 70 \)
- Low-entity (mean response ≤ 3), \( n = 119 \)

Sample items:
- The kind of person someone is, is something basic about them, and it can’t be changed very much.
- Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that they can do to really change that.
- People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can’t really be changed.
- Everyone, no matter who they are, can significantly change their basic characteristics.
- People can change even their more basic qualities.
PILOT STUDY—METHODOLOGY

- Vignettes depicting child transgressions (Chilamkurti & Milner, 1993)
  - Personal
    - Child went to school in wrinkled clothes.
    - Child wrote all over their hands with a pen.
  - Conventional
    - Child refused to help you set the table for dinner.
    - Child watched TV past their bedtime after you told them to go to bed.
  - Moral
    - Child threw stones at a dog.
    - Child took money from a family members wallet.

- Sample questions following each vignette:
  - To what extent do you think throwing stones at a dog indicates that this child is generally defiant?
  - How wrong is throwing stones at a dog?
  - How likely do you think this child threw stones at a dog because he/she was trying to be bad?
  - Do you think this child threw stones at a dog because of the type of personality he/she has or because of situational factors?
  - How would you feel if this child threw stones at a dog?
  - In this situation, how likely is it that you would slap/hit/spank the child?
  - Imagine what this child will be like five years from now. How likely is this child to be a trouble maker in the future?
High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will…

- H1: Endorse more extreme trait ratings.
- H2: Attribute more hostile intent to the child.
- H3: Rate the child’s behavior as more stable.
- H4: Attribute more cause for the transgression to the child’s personality.
- H5: Feel more negative affect related to the child’s behavior.
- H6: Be more likely to respond to the child using harsh parenting practices.
- H7: Be less likely to respond the child using inductive parenting practices.
- H8: Be more likely to predict that the child’s future behavior will be consistent over time.
- H9: Not differ in wrongness/seriousness ratings.
PILOT STUDY--METHODOLOGY

Procedure
- Data collection via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk

Data Analysis Plan
- Assess for demographic covariates
- 2 x 3 mixed-factorial ANOVA, with repeated measures on the second factor
  - Within-subjects factor: Vignettes (Personal, Conventional, Moral)
  - Between-subjects factor: Mindset (Low-entity theory and High-entity theory)
Q: What extent do you think (transgression) indicates the child is generally lazy, stubborn, aggressive…

- **H1**: High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will endorse more extreme trait ratings.
  - There was a significant main effect of transgression type, $F(2, 374) = 209.31, p < .001, d = 2.12$.
  - There was a significant main effect of mindset, $F(1, 187) = 4.61, p = .033$ (one-tailed), $d = .31$.
  - There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F(2, 374) = 0.61, p = .840$. 
Q: How likely do you think this child (transgression) because he/she wanted to annoy you/be bad?

- **H2:** High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will attribute more hostile intent to the child.
- **There was a significant main effect of transgression type,** $F (2, 374) = 146.82, p < .001, d = 1.77.$
- **There was a significant main effect of mindset,** $F (1, 187) = 4.45, p = .036$ (one-tailed), $d = .31$.
- There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F (2, 374) = 0.36, p = .701.$
Q: Do you think this behavior is typical/situational?

- H3: High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will rate the child’s behavior as more stable.
  - There was a significant main effect of transgression type, $F(2, 374) = 8.96, p < .001, d = .44$.
  - There was not a significant main effect of mindset, $F(1, 187) = 0.64, p = .426$ (one-tailed), $d = .11$.
  - There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F(2, 374) = 0.92, p = .401$. 

![Graph showing mean stability rating for Personal, Conventional, and Moral transgressions between High Entity and Low Entity parents.](image)
Q: Do you think this child performed the transgression because of his/her personality?

- H4: High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will attribute more cause for the transgression to the child’s personality.
  - There was a significant main effect of transgression type, $F(2, 374) = 33.68, p < .001$, $d = .85$.
  - There was a significant main effect of mindset, $F(1, 189) = 3.15, p = .039$ (one-tailed), $d = .30$.
  - There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F(2, 374) = 0.98, p = .378$. 
Q: How would you feel if this child performed transgression (upset, irritated, angry, ashamed)?

- H5: High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will feel more negative affect related to the child’s behavior.
  - There was a significant main effect of transgression type, $F(2, 374) = 807.43, p < .001, d = 4.16$.
  - There was not a significant main effect of mindset, $F(1, 187) = 0.94, p = .335$ (one-tailed), $d = .11$
  - There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F(2, 374) = 2.56, p = .079, d = .23$. 
Q: In this situation how likely is it that you would yell/shout/slap/hit the child?

- H6: High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will be more likely to respond to the child using harsh parenting practices.
  - There was a significant main effect of transgression type, $F(2, 374) = 270.60, p < .001$, $d = 2.40$.
  - There was a significant main effect of mindset, $F(1, 187) = 6.39, p = .012$ (one-tailed), $d = .37$.
  - There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F(2, 374) = 0.33, p = .721$. 

![Graph showing mean harsh practices ratings for high and low entity theory parents across different transgression types.](image)
Q: In this situation how likely is it that you would explain/reason with the child?

- H7: High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will be less likely to respond the child using inductive parenting practices.
  - There was a significant main effect of transgression type, $F(2, 374) = 68.39, p < .001$, $d = 1.21$.
  - There was a significant main effect of mindset, $F(1, 187) = 12.58, p < .001$ (one-tailed), $d = .52$.
  - There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F(2, 374) = 0.59, p = .557$. 

[Graph showing Mean Inductive Practices Ratings for Personal, Conventional, and Moral Transgressions for High Entity and Low Entity groups.]
Q: How likely is this child to be a troublemaker 5 years in the future?

- **H8**: High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will be more likely to predict that the child’s behavior will be stable over time.
  - There was a significant main effect of transgression type, $F(2, 374) = 476.26, p < .001$, $d = 3.19$.
  - There was a significant main effect of mindset, $F(1, 187) = 4.37, p = .038$ (one-tailed), $d = .31$.
  - There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F(2, 374) = 0.82, p = .922$. 

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**Graph**

![Graph showing mean future behavior ratings](image)
Q: How wrong/serious is (transgression)?

- **H9**: High-entity theory parents, compared to low-entity theory parents, will not differ in wrongness/seriousness ratings.
  - There was a significant main effect of transgression type, $F(2, 374) = 1455.62, p < .001, d = 5.58$.
  - There was not a significant main effect of mindset, $F(1, 187) = 0.54, p = .463, d = .11$.
  - There was not a significant interaction between transgression type and mindset, $F(2, 374) = 1.50, p = .225$. 

![Graph showing mean wrong/sureous ratings for High Entity and Low Entity transgressions across personal, conventional, and moral transgressions.](image-url)
Findings from the present study suggest that parental mindsets about personality may serve as pre-existing schemata that influence how parents interpret and respond to children’s misbehaviors.

More specifically, parents who endorsed high levels of entity theory related to personality tended to:
- Ascribe more negative traits to misbehaving children,
- Interpret misbehaving children as possessing higher levels of hostile intent,
- View child misbehaviors as indicative of the child’s personality,
- More often select harsh parenting strategies in response to child misbehaviors,
- Less likely to select inductive parenting strategies in response to child misbehaviors,
- More likely to expect that a misbehaving child will exhibit behavior problems in the future.
Consistent with prior research, parental mindsets related to personality were not significantly associated with wrongness ratings.

Thus, mindsets related to personality were associated with judgments about how representative a behavior is of a child’s personality but were not predictive of the extent to which a particular behavior is viewed as wrong.

Parents in the present study appeared to consistently differentially respond to the various forms of transgression (personal/conventional/moral).

However, the associations between parental implicit theories of personality and responses to the vignettes did not vary significantly across the various types of child transgressions.
Based on the results of the preliminary study, we propose to examine whether an intervention designed to reduce entity mindsets about personality would impact how parents respond to vignettes describing child transgressions.

- **Participants**
  - Community parents
- **Randomized Control Design**
  - Screen for high entity theory parents
    - Control group
    - Intervention group
    - Read Article, parent testimonials, write letter

- **Measures**
  - Responses to child transgression vignettes
  - IT General Personality Measure
  - Voodoo Doll Task
QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, & FEEDBACK
REFERENCES


