DO IMPLICIT PERSONALITY THEORIES IMPACT PARENTAL REACTIONS TO CHILD TRANSGRESSIONS? A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL
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OVERVIEW

- Background
  - Introduction
  - Preliminary Study
- Current Study
  - Methods
  - Results
  - Discussion
- Questions
Harsh/coercive parenting practices (e.g., shouting, spanking, slapping) have been deemed “ineffective at best and harmful to children at worst” and are associated with an array of adverse outcomes (Gershoff, 2002, p. 136).

Parental beliefs have been identified as having both direct and indirect effects on parental behaviors.

Milner’s (1993, 2003) social information processing model of child physical abuse asserts that certain types of parental beliefs (i.e., pre-existing schemata) influence the types of evaluations, interpretations, and attributions made by parents and may augment parental risk of employing harsh/coercive and abusive parenting behaviors.

Implicit personality theories (IPTs), a type of pre-existing schemata, are the core beliefs an individual holds about whether the personality attributes of others are 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).
PRELIMINARY STUDY: RESULTS SUMMARY

- Parents ($n = 187$) 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.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

- Findings from the preliminary study suggest that parental IPT beliefs may serve as pre-existing schemata that influence how parents interpret and respond to child transgressions.
  - Interventions designed to alter IPT beliefs have been found to significantly impact how participants respond to the negative behaviors of others (e.g., Yeager et al., 2013).
  - However, to date, no study has examined the impact of an IPT intervention on parents as they respond to child transgressions.

- Current Study: A randomized controlled trial to assess whether an IPT intervention (modified to fit the parenting context) would alter how high entity IPT parents respond to child transgressions.
CURRENT STUDY

CURRENT STUDY: HYPOTHESES

- It is hypothesized that high entity IPT parents in the IPT intervention condition, compared to high entity IPT parents in the control condition, will:
  - H1: Endorse less extreme trait ratings.
  - H2: Attribute less hostile intent to the child.
  - H3: Rate the child's behavior as less stable.
  - H4: Attribute less cause for the transgression to the child's personality.
  - H5: Feel less negative affect related to the child's behavior.
  - H6: Be less likely to respond to the child using harsh parenting practices.
  - H7: Be more likely to respond to the child using inductive parenting practices.
  - H8: Be less likely to predict that the child's behavior will be consistent over time.
  - H9: Not differ in wrongness/seriousness ratings.
  - H10: Be less likely to endorse pin usage on Voodoo Doll Task.

- RQ 1: Do the hypothesized differences between the IPT intervention parents and the control parents vary depending on the type of child transgression?
- RQ 2: Are the hypothesized effects of the IPT intervention on the dependent variables mediated by post-intervention IPT scores?
CURRENT STUDY: DESIGN

- Pre-screen Parent Participants
- Randomly Assigned and Exposed to IPT Intervention or Control Condition
- Completion of Measures (i.e., IPT measure, vignettes & questions, VDT, demographics)

CURRENT STUDY: METHODS

**IPT Intervention Condition**
- Incremental article modified to the parenting context.
- Expert opinions.
- Adapted from previously used IPT intervention materials (Yeager et al., 2013).
- Testimonials from community parents expressing incremental beliefs related to parenting.
- Letter writing exercise.

**Control Condition**
- Video: March of the Penguins
CURRENT STUDY: METHODS

Vignettes (Chilamkurthi & 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 member's 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?

CURRENT STUDY: METHODS

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).

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.
VOODOO DOLL TASK (VDT)

- All parents feel annoyed or angered by their children at times. We are interested in a time that your child made you angry.
  - Where were you when your child made you angry?
  - What did your child do that made you annoyed or angry?
- Thank you for sharing your story. Because thinking about a time when your child made you angry might be upsetting we want you to have a chance to get out any bad feelings before leaving.
- Below is a picture of an outline of a child. Imagine that the child below represents the child who you wrote about on the previous page. Attached are ten stickers you can use to harm the child. You can stick these onto the child to get out your bad feelings. You could think of this like sticking pins into a doll.

Data Analysis Plan

- Assess for demographic differences
- 2 x 3 mixed-factorial ANOVA, with repeated measures on the second factor
  - Between-subjects factor: Condition (IPT parenting intervention and control)
  - Within-subjects factor: Transgression Types (Personal, Conventional, Moral)
    - One-tailed tests
- Poisson regression for VDT
- Mediation analyses
  - PROCESS macro for IBM SPSS (Haynes, 2013)
Analysis includes 63 parents (n = 32 in IPT intervention condition)

- 71.4% were mothers
- 50.8% Caucasian, 44.4% African American, 4.8% Other
- Mean age 33.2 years (SD = 11.1)
- 89.9% received at least some college education
- 44.4% married or cohabitating, 46.0% single, and 9.5% divorced, separated, or widowed
Q: DID CONDITION EFFECT IPT SCORES?

\[ d = 1.68, \quad p < .001 \]

Q: WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK (TRANSGRESSION) INDICATES THE CHILD IS GENERALLY LAZY, STUBBORN, AGGRESSIVE…

\[ d = .28, \quad p = .098 \]

\[ \eta^2 = .578 \quad p < .001 \]
Q: HOW LIKELY DO YOU THINK THIS CHILD (TRANSGRESSION) BECAUSE HE/SHE WANTED TO ANNOY YOU/BE BAD?

Q: IN THIS SITUATION HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOU WOULD YELL/SHOUT/SLAP/HIT THE CHILD?
Q: IN THIS SITUATION HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOU WOULD EXPLAIN/REASON WITH THE CHILD?

\[ d = -.07, \quad p = .32 \]

Q: HOW LIKELY IS THIS CHILD TO BE A TROUBLEMAKER 5 YEARS IN THE FUTURE?

\[ d = .62, \quad p = .009 \]
Q: HOW WRONG/SERIOUS IS (TRANSGRESSION)?

Mean Wrong/Serious Ratings

Transgression Type

Intervention

Control

Personal

Conventional

Moral

\[ d = 0.38, \quad p = 0.140 \]

Q: HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF THIS CHILD PERFORMED TRANSGRESSION (UPSET, IRRITATED, ANGRY, ASHAMED)?

Mean Negative Affect Ratings

Transgression Type

Intervention

Control

Personal

Conventional

Moral

\[ d = 0.16, \quad p = 0.234 \]
Q: DO YOU THINK THIS BEHAVIOR IS TYPICAL/SITUATIONAL?

- Mean Stability Rating
  - Intervention vs Control
  - $\eta_p^2 = 0.022$, $p = 0.255$
  - $d = 0.05$, $p = 0.399$

Q: DO YOU THINK THIS CHILD PERFORMED (THE TRANSGRESSION) BECAUSE OF HIS/HER PERSONALITY?

- Mean Personality Ratings
  - Intervention vs Control
  - $\eta_p^2 = 0.025$, $p = 0.207$
  - $d = 0.20$, $p = 0.221$
Q: DID CONDITION EFFECT PARENTAL PIN USAGE ON THE VOODOO DOLL TASK?

- Condition was associated with parents’ pin usage, $b = 0.73$, $p = .03^*$, RR $= 2.07$, 95% CI [.97, 4.42].
- Parents in the control condition used pins at a rate that was 2.07 times the rate of parents in the IPT intervention condition.

Q: DID POST-INTERVENTION IPT SCORES MEDIATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONDITION AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS OF BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS?

Figure. Mediation Analysis

- Condition (0 = Control; 1 = Intervention)
- Post IPT scores
- Future Expectations of Problems
- $-1.21^{**}$
- $.42^*$
- $.65^*-.15$
The present study yielded evidence consistent with the notion that an IPT intervention can influence how parents react/respond to child transgressions.

- In comparison to parents in the IPT intervention condition, high entity parents in the control condition were more likely to expect future behavior problems and endorse pin usage on VDT.
- High entity parents in the control condition were also marginally:
  - More likely to endorse higher negative trait ratings, attributions of hostile intent, and harsh parenting strategies in response to child transgressions.
  - Less likely to respond to child transgressions with inductive parenting strategies (i.e., explaining the benefits of doing what is expected or using reasoning to help them understand why their behavior was inappropriate).

Limitations

- Small to medium effects suggest IPT interventions may play modest role in parental reactions to child transgressions.
- Reliance on self-report cross-sectional data
- A priori power analyses underestimated sample needed to establish an effect

Future directions

- Replicate and extend study with larger sample
- Enhance intervention (e.g., multiple exposures to incremental content, supplement existing parenting interventions)
REFERENCES


### Means and Standard Deviations of Trait Ratings, Attributions, Evaluations, and Behaviors across Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control (n = 31)</th>
<th>Intervention (n = 32)</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Trait Ratings</td>
<td>3.02 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.78 (0.87)</td>
<td>0.28'</td>
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<td>Personality Attributions</td>
<td>4.00 (0.80)</td>
<td>3.82 (0.97)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
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<td>Typicality Attributions</td>
<td>3.92 (1.03)</td>
<td>3.97 (0.97)</td>
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<td>Hostile Intent Attributions</td>
<td>3.20 (1.14)</td>
<td>2.79 (1.01)</td>
<td>0.38'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Affect</td>
<td>3.88 (1.10)</td>
<td>3.70 (1.00)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harsh Parenting</td>
<td>2.83 (1.15)</td>
<td>2.46 (0.90)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>5.38 (1.05)</td>
<td>5.46 (1.13)</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Expectations</td>
<td>3.04 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.39 (1.07)</td>
<td>0.62**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations of Wrongness</td>
<td>4.66 (0.91)</td>
<td>4.31 (0.92)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Based on one-tailed tests. 'p < .12. * p < .05. ** p < .001.*