



How Far From the Tree Does the Apple Really Fall? Investigating Hostile Attribution Biases in Parents and Their Children

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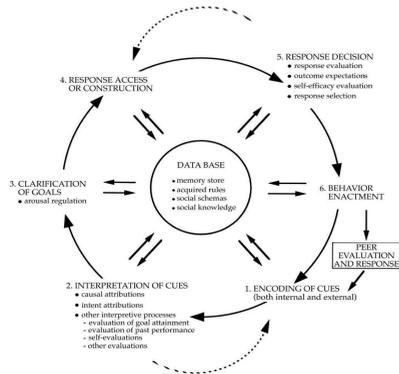
Abstract

A hostile attribution bias (HAB) occurs when one perceives a potentially benign action as contentious, which influences the individual's response to it (Steinberg & Dodge, 1983). The goal of this research was to determine if mother's perceiving hostility in peer interactions with her child would be adopted by her children. 105 mother-child dyads, consisting of children between the ages of three and five, were examined through a qualitative self-report measure of reactions to a set of social situations that were coded for responses that indicated benign or hostile attributions. After partial or missing data were accounted for, data from 38 of those dyads were analyzed. Mothers' perceptions of peer hostility did tend to be associated with children's perceptions of hostility, suggesting that there is potential relationship and that the association may be significant with greater power. Further, within-measure parent and child responses were significantly correlated, suggesting the consistency of reported perceptions of hostility.

Introduction

Hostile attribution biases are held when one perceives a potentially benign action as contentious (Steinberg & Dodge, 1983).

Social Information Processing (SIP) Model (Crick & Dodge, 1994)



Database

- Includes information in the form of scripts and schemas

Scripts:

- Influenced by past social experiences, which in turn influence behavior by becoming a lens through which children process new social information
- Commonly formed through personal experience and observation of family members, other peer interactions, and various forms of media

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1963)

Individuals learn through observation and imitation. Observing a parent misattribute hostility could be modeled later in life

Hypothesis: Using elements from both the Social Information Processing Model and Social Learning Theory, children will model their parents' hostile attribution biases

Methods

Participants

38 mother-child dyads, with children ranging from ages 3-5, all residing in the Western New York Area

Demographics

Mothers:

- 89.5% married (N = 34)
- 81.6% Caucasian (N = 31)
- 57.9% with graduate or professional degree (N = 22)
- 36.8% with > \$100,000 annual income (N = 14)

Children:

- 55.3% male (N = 21)
- 44.7% female (N = 17)

Assessment of Preschool Social Information Processing (APSIP)



Children were asked to report whether the child in a series of hypothetical vignettes was either: *not trying to be mean*, *trying to be a little mean*, or *trying to be really mean* using the faces above to demonstrate.

Example scenario: "Let's pretend that it is group time, so you look for one of your friends and go and sit down next to them. After a minute, your friend gets up and walks away from you."

Parents were asked to respond with how they would explain the scenario to their child if their child approached them describing the situations as having happened to them.

Response Styles

Neutral	Educational/Ambiguous	Hostile
"Accidents happen. You spill things too and that's why mommies do so much laundry."	"Do not pay attention to what others are whispering about. Focus on your own activities and project."	"They weren't being very nice and maybe you shouldn't be friends with them after all."
"Oh, I'm sorry you fell down. I'm sure it as an accident and that 'Susie' bumped into you. I bet she was excited to go outside."	"It doesn't matter that you didn't get invited. You have other friends and can go to their parties."	"I would tell him that the kids were being not very nice and that he doesn't need friends like that anyways. Also that he should never act like that and that we could have more fun without them."

Coding

Child response:

- 0: Not trying to be mean
- 1: Trying to be a little mean
- 2: Trying to be really mean

Parent response:

- 0: Neutral
 - Non-intentional attribution
 - "It was an accident."
- 1: Educational/Ambiguous
 - Advice on how to handle the situation in the future
 - Teachable point of view
 - "That's why we don't do that."
 - Avoidant/ambiguous response
- 2: Hostile
 - "That wasn't nice."
 - "We shouldn't be friends with people like that."

Results

	Descriptive Statistics				
	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Mean	St. Dev.
Relational HAB - Child	0	2	0 - 2	0.9013	0.5857
Instrumental HAB - Child	0	2	0 - 2	0.9298	0.60109
Total HAB - Child	0	2	0 - 2	0.9605	0.45961
Total HAB - Parent	0	0.75	0 - 2	0.2105	0.20776

In examining bivariate associations between maternal and child responses, it was found that parent and child responses to the 'blocks' scenario were significantly negatively correlated ($r = -.41, p = .01$), while the parents' response to the 'whisper' scenario and the children's response to the 'bump' scenario tended to be associated ($r = .27, p = .09$).

Mothers' and children's perceptions of peer hostility did tend to be associated with each other in general, suggesting there may be a relationship that would be significant with greater power.

Correlations within measures were elevated above significance for hostility across situations, suggesting consistency of hostile attribution biases.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to discover whether or not a child will model hostile attributions similarly to their parents. Data analysis found that trends were present, which may become significant with a larger population. Due to the small sample size after missing data were accounted for, additional research will have to be conducted to see if the associations found hold true with greater power. Additionally, other moderators that were not directly examined here could be at play, including the potential emotional 'buffer' of another parent or guardian, or the potential influence of parenting style (i.e. harsh parenting) or the quality of parent-child relationship (attachment).

References

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