Implicit Self-Theories of Shyness: Predictors and Correlates in Preadolescence

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Introduction

- Implicit theories of intelligence and personality refer to a belief that a characteristic is a fixed trait (entity view) versus the belief that it is changeable and controllable (incremental view).
- Implicit theories have predicted children’s achievement and social responses (e.g., Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995), and young adults’ implicit theories of shyness predicted their goals, responses, and consequences in social situations (Beer, 2002).
- The current study was the first to explore the relations between children’s implicit theories of shyness, their perceptions of others’ theories of shyness, and their self-perceived shyness.

Participants

- Forty-six 10-12-year-old children (M = 10.74, SD = .88; 25 boys) were recruited from community organizations.

Method and Measures

- An individually-administered computer task assessed participants’ perceptions of others’ shyness theories, which included 6 scenarios describing others’ (mother, teacher, and friend) efforts to help a same-sex shy child. Following each story, children were asked two questions. The first question was “how much do you think the <other> would try again to help <Tom or Sue>?” Responses to the first question were rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely yes), and recoded so that higher scores indicated others were perceived to have entity-oriented theories of shyness. An aggregate score was created across the six scenarios (α = .72).
- The 26-item Children’s Shyness Questionnaire (Crozier, 1995) was used to measure participants’ self-perceived shyness.
- The children’s implicit self-theories of shyness were assessed using the 6-question Implicit Self-Theories of Shyness Scale (Beer, 2002). Higher scores indicated greater entity orientation. Only the first 3 items were used in the analyses (α = .58), given very low internal consistency of the entire scale (α = .26).

Results and Discussion

See Table 1 for descriptive statistics (No gender or age differences were found in these variables).

Hypothesis 1.

In support of our first hypothesis, we found a significant positive correlation between children’s implicit self-theories and their perceptions of others’ shyness theories (r = .327, p < .05).

Confirmation of self theories may have implications for children’s affective response to their own shyness and confidence to change it. Beliefs about shyness could be enhanced for children who have an incremental-oriented theory of shyness, perhaps increasing their ability to overcome their shyness. For those with an entity-oriented theory, perceptions that others viewed shyness as a fixed trait might make them feel more relaxed and experience less self-pressure to change, even if they thought of as shyness as “bad”, because others also think shyness cannot be changed.

Congruence between children’s own and perceptions of others’ implicit theories might reflect “belief bias” (Wagman, 1997), reflecting people’s need to have a sense of prediction of and control over the world.

Conversely, incongruence may reflect higher-order thinking, shown by children’s ability to differentiate their own and others’ theories of shyness.

Hypothesis 2.

The hypothesized curvilinear relation between shyness and shyness self-theories was not found (see Table 2). However, a linear relation existed, indicating that the higher self-perceived shyness, the more likely the child was to believe that shyness could not easily be changed.

Thus, experiencing shyness may affect the development of shyness theories, which may depend on how “severe” children perceive their shyness to be.

Variability in children’s own direct experience of shyness might not be the only pathway to their implicit self-theories of shyness. Other factors, such as parents’ beliefs about shyness and their reaction to the children’s shyness also may be important. In addition, peer interactions could influence the development of shyness theories, depending on whether children’s changes in shyness receive positive or negative peer feedback. Clarification of these issues awaits future research efforts.

Limitations

- A more reliable measure of children’s implicit self-theories of shyness is needed, perhaps by increasing the number of the items and/or re-wording the items to improve their intercorrelations.
- The current data are correlational. Future research should include both longitudinal research and experimental designs in which researchers attempt to change children’s theories, in order to clarify causal direction between self-theories of shyness and self-perceived shyness.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Major Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSQ</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITS</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTS</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CSQ = Children’s Shyness Questionnaire; ITS = implicit self-theories of shyness; PTS = perceptions of others’ theories of shyness.

Table 2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Implicit Self-Theories of Shyness from Self-Perceived Shyness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables entered step</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R 2</th>
<th>F change</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. F change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ITS</td>
<td>.904</td>
<td>.267***</td>
<td>16.937</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Squared ITS</td>
<td>.399</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>55.843</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ITS = implicit self-theories of shyness.