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How Parents Might Think About Little Freddy: Explorations of the Social Cognition of People Who Are At-Risk.

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How Parents Might Think About Little Freddy: Explorations of the Social Cognition of People Who Are At-Risk for Child Abuse

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Beginnings

- Social Cognition
  - The Study of Social Thought
  - Emphasis on COGNITIVE METHODS that can be used to TRACE the PROCESSES and STRUCTURES that influence thinking about others

The Social Cognition of Child Abusers? Why?

- **Can be more effective at prevention and treatment if understand causes**
- **Potential Abusers may "think differently" about kids than non-abusers – may be the first step on the path to abuse**
  - **Example: Little Freddy looks cross-eyed at parent.**
    - **"Normal" Parent – interprets look as child playfulness, laughs it off**
    - **Parent With Abuse Potential – interprets look as evidence of child disobedience, instigates "discipline" (which could escalate into abuse)**

The Inference Detection Problem

- **How can one detect such differential inferences without directly asking for impression judgments?**
  - **Want to avoid social desirability effects, response editing, use of explicit theories, etc.**
- **Indirect assessment tasks**
  - **Example: employ a CUED RECALL paradigm**
    - **According to the encoding specificity hypothesis, cues present at event encoding can be re-presented to facilitate recall.**
    - **These include INTERNALLY GENERATED cues, such as thoughts.**
      - **Example Sentence: He kicked the cat**
      - **Internal Response at encoding: Mean**
      - **Later, present Mean, might cue behavior recall**

Study 1: The Cued Recall Paradigm - Overview

- **Present behavior descriptions**
- **Later, engage in description recall task**
  - **words that might have been generated during encoding provided as cues to recall**
- **See if these cue words work differently for parents high in child abuse risk and those low in risk**
  - **Working hypothesis: at-risk parents more likely to view behavior as "difficult", "uncooperative", or "hostile" – these may be better memory cues for such parents**

And The Assessment of Child Abuse Potential Comes From Where?

- **The CAP**
  - **Sample Ref: Milner, J. S. (1989). Additional cross-validation of the Child Abuse Potential Inventory. *J Consulting & Clin Psych, 1,* 219-223.**
- **Developed and Validated for Almost 30 Years**
  - **Classification rates based on discriminant analysis of child physical abusers and matched comparison parents are in the mid-80% to low-90% range.**
- **Typical Use: Categorical (Hi Vs Low)**
  - **A fruitful case study for the categorical vs. continuous predictor debate**
- **Potential confounds w/CAP (gender, age, race, education, marital status, and number of children) either not related to d.v.'s or are covaried out in analyses**

Study 1: Using Cued Recall to Assess Inferences (Crouch et al., 2007)

- Real Parents
  - CAP Low (*n*=41) = below 166
  - CAP High (*n*=25) = above 166
- Paradigm
  - Parents memorized sentences that described ambiguous caregiving situations.
  - Memory Goal: "Please read each sentence that appears on the screen. Try to remember as much as you can of each sentence."

Study 1: Using Cued Recall to Assess Inferences (Crouch et al., 2007)

- After a brief delay, participants were asked to recall the sentences.
  - "Please recall as many and as much of each of the sentences you saw earlier. Below is a list of words that were **not** used in the sentences but which may help you recall the sentences. Following each word, write down any sentences or parts of sentences that come to mind. Try to remember as much as you can."
  - Format:
    - Peaceful _____
    - Difficult _____

Study 1: Using Cued Recall to Assess Inferences (Crouch et al., 2007)

- 3-Part Ambiguous Sentences (name, action, context)
  - Destiny raised her brow as her mother combed her hair.
  - Hannah slapped her hand on the tray as her mother fed her.
  - Riley kicked his legs as his mother changed his diaper.
- Cue Word List
  - uncooperative, difficult, irritable, negative, hostile, unfriendly
  - peaceful, accepting, loving, happy, sweet, friendly

Study 1: Using Cued Recall to Assess Inferences (Crouch et al., 2007)

Table 2
Mean (SD) recall scores for low and high CPA-risk parents by cues type and sentence part.

Cue Type/ Sentence Part	CPA-risk Status: Low (*n* = 42)		CPA-risk Status: High (*n* = 25)	
Hostile Cues				
Name	0.97 (1.35)		0.96 (1.17)	
Action	3.53 (2.12)		3.52 (2.02)	
Context	2.51 (1.61)		2.92 (1.60)	
Total	7.02 (3.83)	60.5%	7.40 (3.32)	71.7%
Nonhostile Cues				
Name	0.73 (0.92)		0.48 (0.82)	
Action	1.95 (1.92)		1.28 (1.56)	
Context	1.90 (1.67)		1.16 (1.02)	
Total	4.58 (3.58)		2.92 (2.49)	

IN RELATIVE (%) TERMS...Evidence for greater spontaneous use of negative constructs OR lessened use of positive constructs in High Risk Parents

Possible Future Directions: Thesis and Dissertation Ideas for the Attentive and Interested Graduate Student

- The Cue Word List procedure is kind of clunky
  - Might try using a false recognition procedure in which a fourth element is sometimes added
    - Present:
      - Hannah slapped her hand on the tray as her mother fed her
      - Happy Riley kicked his legs as his mother changed his diaper
    - Test with a reality monitoring question: is this EXACTLY what was presented?
      - #1 - Irritable Hannah slapped her hand on the tray as her mother fed her
      - #2 - Happy Riley kicked his legs as his mother changed his diaper
        - FALSE RECOGNITION (yes to #1) may indicate construct activation (Irritable) during encoding

Possible Future Directions: More Thesis and Dissertation Ideas for the Attentive and Interested Graduate Student

- Remember..We Social Cognition Nerds Emphasize PROCESS Details
  - Need to clean the memory finding up – which is it, greater use of negative constructs during encoding or lower use of positive (or both)?
  - Is it encoding at all? Rule out pre-existing link idea…
    - Cue word prompts recall, but NOT because it was generated at encoding
    - Instead, there may be a pre-existing concept-behavior link that is used to find familiar behaviors during recall
      - Hmm..what might have been irritable? Oh yeah, slapping the hand on the tray…

More Process and Structure Stuff: What Might Be Responsible for the Differential Inference Tendencies Observed In Study 1?

- Possibility 1: Differential CONSTRUCT ACCESSIBILITY
  - "Readiness" of a construct to be used when an appropriate stimulus comes along
    - Chronic Sources (e.g., personality, long-term environment)
    - Temporary sources (e.g., short-term environmental exposure)
- The "protypical" construct accessibility study in social psychology and it's "chronicity" extension
- Question: Can accessibility differences be related to (and possibly contribute to) abuse risk via their influence on inferences/judgments?

Study 2a
The State of The Cognitive System "Hostile" Accessibility (Farc et al., 2008).

- Personality differences in accessibility of "hostile" in real parents?
  - CAP Low (*n*=79) = 69.4
  - CAP High (*n*=29) = 254.4

Study 2a
The State of The Cognitive System "Hostile" Accessibility (Farc et al., 2008).

- Temporary accessibility effects
  - Meanness Priming vs. Neutral Priming (sentence unscrambling task)
    - Hostile priming condition - nine (of 12) of the scrambled word sets contained:
      - uncooperative, aggressive, defiant, irritable, mean, oppositional, unfriendly, cold, and violent
        - Mean the was cat
    - Neutral priming condition - the same twelve sets of scrambled words were used, with the exception that each hostility-related word was replaced with:
      - there, brown, quietly, letter, home, gone, taller, blue, and long
        - Brown the was cat

Study 2a
The State of The Cognitive System "Hostile" Accessibility (Farc et al., 2008)

- The Stimuli to be Interpreted: Ambiguous Child Photos

- Taken from a set of cards designed to teach parents to recognize various subtle and potent engagement and disengagement cues displayed by children less than three years of age (Sumner & Spietz, 2003).
- Pretested to be ambiguous (equally hostile or cooperative)

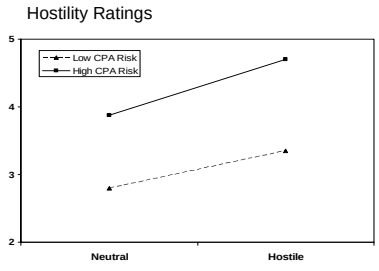
Study 2a
The State of The Cognitive System
"Hostile" Accessibility (Farc et al., 2008)

- **The experiment's flow: overview**
  - **Priming Task (hostile or neutral)**
  - **2 minute filler task (code-number matching task)**
  - **Photo & rating task**
  - **CAP**

Study 2a
The State of The Cognitive System
"Hostile" Accessibility (Farc et al., 2008)

- **Parents viewed 3 ambiguous child photos**
- **Rated each child on nine traits**
  - **hostile, negative, difficult, friendly, cooperative, sweet, content, lively, attached**
  - **Trait ratings were made on a 10-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*extremely likely*)**
    - **Expect effects only on hostile/negative/difficult**
    - **Present results only for hostile (prettiest)**

The State of The Cognitive System
"Hostile" Accessibility (Farc et al., 2008)
Study 2a - Supraliminal Priming

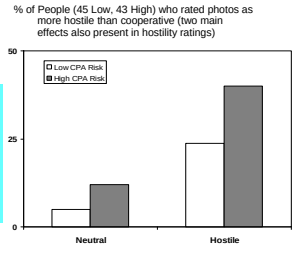


The State of The Cognitive System
"Hostile" Accessibility (Farc et al., 2008)
Study 2b – Subliminal Priming

The Parafoveal Priming Technique

Subliminal Priming Conditions (interaction n.s.)

	Low CPA risk		High CPA risk	
Trait	Neutral	Hostile	Neutral	Hostile
Hostile	2.3 (1.2)	3.6 (1.5)	3.6 (1.7)	4.0 (1.6)



Some Implications

- Both chronic and temporary sources of activation may contribute to the interpretation of child behavior
- High abuse risk parents may be chronic for interpretations of "hostility"
- This chronic tendency may be exacerbated by recent experience (via construct activation)
- But even low risk parents' judgments can be influenced by recent experience (via construct activation)
  - Chronic and temporary sources seem to be additive (at least sometimes)
- Lack of awareness of effects of recent experience!

Possible Future Directions: Thesis and Dissertation Ideas for the Attentive and Interested Graduate Student

- The specificity-to-kids (vs. adults) issue
  - How much does specificity matter?
- The specificity to MY KID issue
- Is "hostility" the right construct to prime/explore?
  - "Disobedient"? "Difficult"? "Bad"?
    - Will one of these produce evidence of specificity?
- Linking construct activation to parent behavior:
  - Do these judgment tendencies actually lead to higher abuse risk?

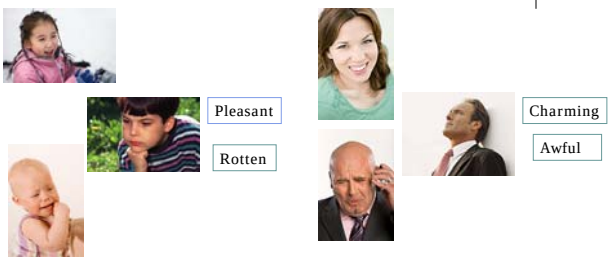
More Process and Structure Stuff: What Else Might Be Responsible for the Differential Inference Tendencies Observed In Study 1?

- **What about overall EVALUATION?**
  - High abuse risk parents may like kids LESS than low abuse risk parents
  - Lower liking may predispose high abuse risk parents to interpret behavior negatively

Assessing "Implicit" Evaluation

- "Evaluative priming" technique: the Fazio paradigm (DESCRIPTION SIMPLIFIED!)
  - Task: Timed good-bad decisions about a target stimulus
  - Target stimulus preceded by priming stimulus
  - Match between the evaluative tone of priming stimulus and target stimulus SPEEDS responses to the target stimulus
    - Example 😀 ... cake speeds responses to cake
    - Can be used to explore the affective properties of the prime or the target

Study 3: Implicit Evaluation of Kids (vs. Adults) in the Fazio Evaluative (good/bad response) Priming Paradigm (Risser's Ph.D., 2008)



- Does child photo speed responses to "bad" words (or not speed responses to "good" words) in those parents with abuse potential (low *n* [below 91]= 40, high *n* [above 165] = 35)?
- Does such an effect depend on perceptions of child state (positive, neutral, negative)

Study 3: Evaluative Priming Results (Risser's Ph.D., 2008)

Replication is Good!

		Student Sample Photo Valence			Adult Sample Photo Valence		
		+	0	-	+	0	-
Adjective	+	(622.72)	637.18	[639.01]	(772.86)	783.20	[838.25]
Valence	-	[650.37]	642.75	(635.67)	[826.45]	821.63	(806.65)

No Risk Group Effects, not dependent on Age of Person in Photo, but ...

Sample ingroup preference effect?

We Like Us?

		Face Type		Face Type	
		Child	Adult	Child	Adult
Adjective	+	647.19	(645.12)	807.81	(777.9)
Valence	-	(635.74)	650.18	808.99	[827.7]

Some Preliminary Conclusions?

- No differential evaluations of kids by parental risk status!
  - Thus, results of Study 1 may not be due to evaluation (good/bad), but instead, to semantic construct activation (disobedient)
- However, how confident are we in this conclusion?

Possible Future Directions: Thesis and Dissertation Ideas for the Attentive and Interested Graduate Student

- Need greater purity in word sets, separating valence from child/caregiving meaning
  - Non-social positive (flower) vs. positive interpersonal behavior (hug)
  - Non-social negative (snake) vs. negative interpersonal behavior (spank)
- Worth pursuing further with other implicit evaluation paradigms?
  - IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998)
  - GNAT (Nosek & Banaji, 2001)
  - Affective Simon task (De Houwer, 2003)
  - Affect Misattribution (Payne, et al., 2005)

More Possible Future Directions: Thesis and Dissertation Ideas for the Attentive and Interested Graduate Student

- Evaluative responses are context dependent
  - Did we work against ourselves in using both child/adult and facial expressions in a common stimulus presentation?
  - What if we used ONLY ambiguous child faces as primes mixed in with a lot of random non-social photos?
- Evaluation of what? What if it's not kid-ness that is important to evaluations, but evaluations of kids when they behave?
  - For high risk parents, "cross-eyed look" behavior is especially bad coming from a kid (more on this later)

Study 4 – The Broader Effects of Priming (Crouch et al., 2008)

- Priming is a non-specific kind of thing – lots of stuff can happen in response to a priming manipulation
  - Sentence unscrambling task priming hostile:
    - Might cause interpretation of world as hostile
    - Might cause perceiver to FEEL hostile
- Responses to primes may alter BEHAVIOR
  - Indirect via interpretations of others (cooperative priming)
  - Direct?!?!?
    - The Bargh "elderly" studies and walking speed
    - Priming "professor" improves trivial pursuit performance (Dijksterhuis)

Study 4 – The Broader Effects of Priming (Crouch et al., 2008)

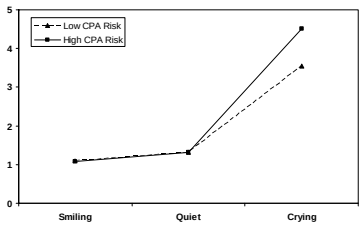
- P's are parents who vary in abuse risk (*n*'s = 52, 30, *M*'s = 75, 246)
- Use Scrambled Sentence Test to prime hostility (or not)
- Expose to Crying Baby Video, Non-Crying Baby Video, Happy Baby Video

Study 4 – The Broader Effects of Priming (Crouch et al., 2008)

- Among the DV's
  - Dynamometer Task (Full Strength/Half Strength) While Video On Screen
    - Prior training
    - Modulation scores (% of full grip)
    - Does risk/priming/video relate to grip modulation ability?
      - At-risk parents poorer at task? When feeling hostile? When interpreting baby as hostile?
  - After viewing each video:
    - Ratings of babies
      - Does priming/risk group/video affect judgments of babies?
        - Person perception priming effects often depend on ambiguity, so maybe not…but maybe (crying might be ambiguous)
    - Ratings of self
      - Does priming/risk group/video viewed affect self-perceived hostility?

Study 4 – The Broader Effects of Priming (Crouch et al., 2008)

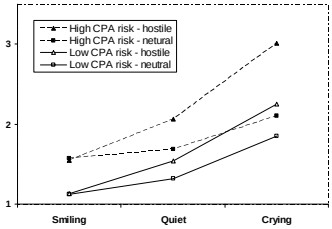
Baby ratings after each video: Average of hostile, negative, difficult



Not further moderated by priming – not an ambiguous stimulus?

Study 4 – The Broader Effects of Priming (Crouch et al., 2008)

Self ratings of felt hostility made after each baby video



Study 4 – The Broader Effects of Priming (Crouch et al., 2008)

Modulation Results (% of initial grip)

		Risk Group	
		Lo	Hi
Priming	Neutral	.72	.64
	Hostile	.69	.71

- Priming With Hostility reduced modulation ability for high risk parents- stronger grip relative to neutral priming condition…but Baseline modulation not equal
- NOT moderated by Video Type

Some Conclusions

- Priming does have broad effects
  - Self-perception of emotion
  - Behavior modulation
- Sometimes interacts with actor characteristics (risk) and environment (video type) = self-hostility ratings
- Abuse risk also is related to judgments about kids (negative when crying)

Possible Future Directions: Thesis and Dissertation Ideas for the Attentive and Interested Graduate Student

- Might be replicated with video type a between subjects variable (eliminate possible carry-over effects on behavior task).
- Develop and test explanation for priming-behavior effects (Direct Manifestation of Hostility (e.g., Bargh)? Arousal? Cognitive load?)
- WHY is abuse risk related to increased negative judgments of crying baby?
  - Self-arousal? Interpretation of baby behavior? Evaluations of crying babies?
- Specificity redux (THEIR crying baby, not just A crying baby)
- Study 1 – Mediator madness: interpretations of hostile behavior or increased feelings of hostility?

Teasers: Things Under Way

- Another Way To Look at Construct Activation Effects: Lexical Decision Task Study
  - Follow ups to understand the Lexical Decision Task Results
  - Reconciling lexical decision studies & Heather Risser's evaluative priming studies
- More inference stuff: Spontaneous Trait Inference studies (Lauren Irwin's M.A. Thesis)

Endings

- Core idea underlying this research is that potential abusers may "think differently" about kids than non-abusers – may be the first step on the path to abuse
- We are trying to use COGNITIVE METHODS to TRACE the PROCESSES and STRUCTURES that may characterize potential abusers
- We have results suggesting that one set of differences lies in the accessibility of hostility-related constructs and how those influence judgments of children … but this evidence is not ironclad
- Other data suggest that child abuse potential is related to self-perceived emotions and behaviors, but we don't fully understand the mechanisms yet

Thanks for your time and attention!
Let the discussion commence!