Infant Temperament, Socially Aversive Traits, and Maternal Mindfulness

Mahlon Brady, mahlonl@live.unc.edu
Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Introduction

- Infant temperament influences the way children regulate behavior, handle emotions, etc., and is indicative of later development & psychiatric risk.
- Insensitive parental responses contribute to infant distress, negative cognitions and attitudes, and a maladaptive regulatory style. Therefore, socially aversive traits (psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism) may negatively impact infant development, too.
- Some psychologists believe that mindfulness is a fundamental parenting skill that may lead parents to develop higher quality relationships with their children.

We hypothesized that (1) maternal socially aversive traits negatively impact infant temperament and (2) maternal mindfulness moderates this association.

Methods

- Study participants: 153 mothers & infants
  - Mothers: 58.8% White (non-Hispanic), average age of 31, 64% earned bachelor’s degree or higher
  - Infants: Full-term, 50.3% male
- Measures
  - Self-reported Short Dark Triad (SD3)
  - Self-reported Three Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire
  - Parent-reported Infant Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ)
  - RA-reported Infant Behavior Record (IBR)

Measures Recorded at 6-months

- Parent-reported Infant Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ)
- RA-reported: Infant Behavior Record (IBR)

Machiavellianism & Attention

Controlling for covariates (child age at 6 months, maternal age at birth, maternal race/ethnicity, maternal education, mindfulness mean, remote visit), we found there is a significant negative relationship between Machiavellianism and IBQ Attention.

Psychopathy & Orienting and Regulatory Control

Controlling for covariates (child age at 6 months, maternal age at birth, maternal race/ethnicity, maternal education, mindfulness mean, remote visit), we found there is a significant negative relationship between Machiavellianism and IBQ Orienting and Regulatory Control.

Mindfulness as a Moderator

Figure 1. When mindfulness is low, there is a significant negative relationship between narcissism and social approach. When mindfulness is high, there is no significant relationship.

Figure 2. When mindfulness is low, there is a significant negative relationship between narcissism and affect. When mindfulness is high, there is a significant positive relationship between narcissism and affect.

Conclusions

- This study provides some evidence for negative relationships between maternal socially aversive traits and infant temperament as well as the moderation of maternal mindfulness on this impact.
- If additional research provides support for the protective effect of mindfulness, it seems reasonable to encourage mothers to utilize mindfulness techniques broadly.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Dr. Rebecca Stephens, for your unwavering support and guidance. Thank you, Dr. Beth Kurtz-Coates and Dr. Patrick Harrison, for your mentorship. Thank you, Dr. Cathi Propper, for permitting me to use data from your study and for serving as my mentor. Thank you, Dr. Andrea Hussong and Dr. Nicole Short, for being part of my committee.