

An Investigation of Implicit Personality Theories and Coping Strategies

Levy, Stroessner, and Dweck (1998) suggest that incremental theorists—those who judge traits as malleable—manage information regarding others and the self differently than entity theorists, who judge traits as fixed. Conceptually understanding these beliefs provides guidance towards the prediction of behavior, particularly coping strategies. As a result, the present study investigated the relationship between implicit theories and specific coping mechanisms. A total of 68 online participants were administered adapted scales of implicit theories of well-being, which measured incremental and entity attitudes toward well-being (Howell, Passmore, & Holder, 2015). Self-blame, planning, self-distraction, and behavioral disengagement subscales from the Brief COPE were also administered (Carver, 1997). Results indicated that those who had higher levels of entity beliefs were more likely to cope using more passive strategies including self-distraction ($r = 0.34, p = 0.005$) and behavioral disengagement ($r = 0.33, p = 0.001$). Those who had higher levels of incremental beliefs were more likely to engage in self-blame ($r = 0.24, p = 0.05$). Consistent with implicit personality theory, entity theorists chose avoidant coping strategies such as behavioral disengagement and self-distraction. In contrast, incremental theorists relied primarily on self-blame. Ordinarily, self-blame has been conceptualized as a more passive strategy that occurs instead of active coping. Through the lens of implicit personality theory, however, one could argue that a self-blame coping strategy would, by necessity, occur prior to adapting a more active strategy. These results highlight the importance of identifying individuals' implicit theories of the world in helping them cope with difficult situations.