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Chapter 4

INEXPERIENCED VERSUS EXPERIENCED MOTHERS' AND PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING PERSUASIVE MESSAGES TO YOUNG CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This chapter compares the message strategies of parents and preschool teachers for persuading young children and reveals the effect of parenting and teaching experience on strategies adopted. The authors asked 454 mothers and 181 preschool teachers to select one of two framed messages to enhance children's self-regulation ability. The results showed that, compared with no difference in message selection between inexperienced mothers and inexperienced preschool teachers, the strategy of experienced teachers shifted to a more positively-framed approach, whereas that of experienced mothers shifted to a more negatively-framed approach. The contrasting results in message strategy that changed with the parenting/teaching experience support the self-regulatory theory, in which caregivers develop children's self-regulation ability through regulatory focus messages. This has implications for the development of parenting and teaching styles.

Keywords: persuasive strategy, message framing, experience effect, self-regulation, parent, preschool teacher

INTRODUCTION

There is sufficient evidence that parenting is associated with the development of self-regulation (Baumrind 1991; Karreman, van Tuijl, van Aken and Deković 2006; Keller 2008; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg and Dornbusch 1991; Purdie, Carroll and Roche 2004). This is especially so with respect to the role of parenting during early childhood in adolescent self-regulation: Keller (2008) provides evidence supporting Higgins's (1997) self-regulatory focus theory that caregiver-child interactions during childhood develop two regulatory focus orientations. Regulatory focus is a motivational variable that influences the way an individual processes information and controls behavior. Higgins (1997) hypothesized that encouraging or supportive parenting engenders a promotion focus, in which self-regulation is concerned with growth, achievement, and the presence/absence of positive outcomes and that critical/punitive parenting engenders a prevention focus, in which self-regulation is concerned with safety, security, and the presence/absence of negative outcomes. Keller (2008) measured the degree to which participants experienced different parenting styles and their chronic self-regulatory focus; he found that responsive (authoritative) parenting nurtured promotion-focused self-regulation, whereas restrictive (authoritarian) parenting nurtured prevention-focused self-regulation.

In accordance with the above, a recent study identified parental behavior aimed at promoting young children's self-regulation abilities and examined whether parenting styles are reflected in their strategy of regulatory focus messages targeting children (Sasaki and Hayashi 2015). As proposed in the self-regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997), distinct parenting styles are related to regulatory focus orientations, which suggests that various types of parental persuasive messages (cf. deTurck and Miller 1983; Marwell and Schmitt 1967) can be classified according to their promotion- and prevention-focused orientations. Sasaki and Hayashi (2015) therefore developed alternatives of positively- or negatively-framed parental messages with a promotion focus versus a prevention focus and investigated which of the two messages, each tailored to one of the regulatory foci, was selected by mothers of preschool children. Consequently, it was shown that the parental message strategy is dependent on situational variation in a message's regulatory focus

and on individual differences in parenting style. Regarding a message's regulatory focus, mothers favored a positively-framed strategy when giving a promotion-focused message to a young child and a negatively-framed strategy when giving a prevention-focused message. This is consistent with the previous finding that adolescents perceive that their parents strategically use positive or negative messages depending on different persuasive situations (deTurck and Miller 1983). Regarding parenting style, the more mothers endorsed responsive parenting, the more they expressed a preference for a positively-framed strategy, whereas the more mothers endorsed restrictive parenting, the less they preferred the positively-framed strategy. This result, based on parental views, is consistent with that of Keller's (2008) study on adolescent views of the same phenomenon.

Sasaki and Hayashi's (2015) findings offer evidence for Higgins's (1997) theory that emphasizes the role of caregiver-child interactions, suggesting that parents may foster self-regulation in children through regulatory focus messages. However, it is important to note that parents may change their own message strategy, consciously or unconsciously, with age and experience: studies have shown that parenting styles develop through parent-child interactions (Stattin and Kerr 2000; Williams, Ciarrochi and Heaven 2012). Although Williams et al. (2012) note an absence of longitudinal studies reporting systematic change in parenting styles with age; a cross-sectional study by Smetana (1995) suggested that parents become more authoritarian and less authoritative with age. This can be restated in Higgins and Silberman's (1998) terms as follows: parents behave in a more critical/punitive and a less encouraging manner toward children as they get older. Applying the findings of Sasaki and Hayashi (2015), parents' selection of regulatory focus messages is expected to shift to a negatively-framed strategy as they gain parenting experience.

The abovementioned studies on parenting and self-regulation are applicable to educational settings (Soenens and Vansteenkiste 2005; Walker 2008; Wentzel 2002). For instance, teaching practices can be characterized according to Baumrind's (1967) model of parenting (Walker 2008), which notes three types of teaching: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Concerning its relation to self-regulation, it has been shown that teaching styles are influenced by teachers' regulatory focus (Leung and Lam 2003; Pierro, Presaghi, Higgins and Kruglanski 2009), and that teaching and parenting styles have an influence on children's self-regulation (d'Ailly 2003; Soenens and Vansteenkiste 2005). Considering the commonalities between parenting and teaching, it is appropriate to compare the message strategies for

persuading children used by parents and teachers. This chapter examines whether teachers adopt the same strategy as parents, namely, a positively-framed message for promotion-focused objectives and a negatively-framed message for prevention-focused objectives.

In addition, this chapter predicts that the effect of age/experience for teachers will contrast with that for parents, as described above. A teacher or child caregiver is generally required to have an understanding, warm, open, and accepting attitude toward children (Hayes 2003; McDevitt and Ormrod 2012). Thus, it can be inferred that, with experience, teachers or caregivers come to display a more desirable attitude toward students, as described above. In that case, it might be anticipated that, with experience, teachers' selection of regulatory focus messages would shift to a positively-framed strategy. From the contrasting predictions of age/experience between parents' and teachers' message strategies, the following hypothesis is derived: Experienced teachers favor a positively-framed strategy more than do inexperienced teachers, while experienced parents favor a negatively-framed strategy more than do inexperienced parents.

To address these issues, a framed message selection paradigm was employed with mothers and teachers of preschool children. In an experimental survey, each participant responded to message selection problems, including promotion- and prevention-focused messages for persuading young children.

METHODS

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 454 Japanese mothers of preschool children and 181 female preschool teachers. The preschools, which included five kindergartens (*yochien*) and nine childcare centers (*hoikuen*), are located in Niigata, a rural area of Japan. The number of children in each family ranged from one to four ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.72$). The age of the firstborn child ranged from 8 to 216 months ($M = 81.22$, $SD = 40.92$). The tenure of the preschool teachers was from 0 to 38 years ($M = 11.64$, $SD = 11.73$). Each mother received a questionnaire from the preschool and was asked to complete the survey and return it to the preschool. The teachers were asked to select the persuasive message that they as teachers would be more likely to choose. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. After the data were analyzed and summarized, the findings were made available to all participants.

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of seven message-selection problems developed by Sasaki and Hayashi (2015), including three promotion-focused objectives (generation of physical energy, growth, enjoyment) and four prevention-focused objectives (loss aversion, cavity prevention, injury prevention, and health). The manipulation check in the previous study showed that the statements in the message selection problems indeed convey promotion- and prevention-focused objectives. The problems of the prevention-focused and promotion-focused conditions were presented in counterbalanced order.

After the participants read a brief context for the communication (e.g., “To a child who does not like naps”; “To a child who loses his/her toys”), they were asked to select what message they would be more likely to use to communicate three promotion-focused and four prevention-focused objectives. For each promotion-/prevention-focused objective, participants could choose between a positively-framed message that encouraged a desired end state (e.g., “If you take a nap, you will be full of energy”; “If you clean up your toys, you will not lose your toys”) or a negatively-framed message that warned about an undesired end state (e.g., “If you don’t take a nap, you will not be full of energy”; “If you don’t clean up your toys, you will lose your toys”). The dependent variable was derived from the number of positively- and negatively-framed messages chosen by participants. A complete list of the message selection problems appears in the Appendix.

To analyze the role of age and experience, the following basic attributes of participants were used: For mothers’ childrearing, individual differences in the length of experience were calculated with respect to age of firstborn child; for teachers’ caregiving, individual differences were calculated on the basis of total service length at any preschool where teachers had worked.

RESULTS

We counted the number of times participants chose a positively-framed message for promotion- and prevention-focused objectives. We then divided the resulting frequency scores by the number of objectives to obtain the proportion of selected positively-framed messages. We performed a median split of the length of the mothers’ childrearing experience by categorizing mothers into experienced and inexperienced groups, ranging from 8 to 71

months and 72 to 216 months, respectively. We performed another median split on the length of teachers' caregiving experiences, categorizing the preschool teachers into experienced and inexperienced groups, ranging from 0 to 6 years and from 7 to 38 years, respectively.

To examine the effect of mothers' and teachers' experience on message strategy for promotion-/prevention-focused objectives, a 2 (promotion-focused vs. prevention-focused objectives) \times 2 (mother vs. preschool teacher) \times 2 (experienced vs. inexperienced) mixed-design ANOVA was performed on the proportion of positively-framed strategies chosen. As shown in Figure 1, the analysis revealed significant main effects for occupation (mother or teacher) and the message's regulatory focus, $F(1, 450) = 43.36, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$ and $F(1, 450) = 759.90, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .63$, respectively. The two-way interactions between occupation and experience, and between experience and regulatory focus were significant, $F(1, 450) = 21.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$ and $F(1, 450) = 5.88, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .01$, respectively. The other interactions were not significant, $F_s < 1.98, p_s > .1$. There was a significant difference between experienced mothers and teachers, $F(1, 450) = 63.46, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$, but no significant difference between inexperienced mothers and teachers, $F(1, 450) = 1.81, p > .10$. A significant difference in experience was seen in both mothers and teachers, $F(1, 450) = 6.23, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .01$ and $F(1, 450) = 17.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$, respectively.

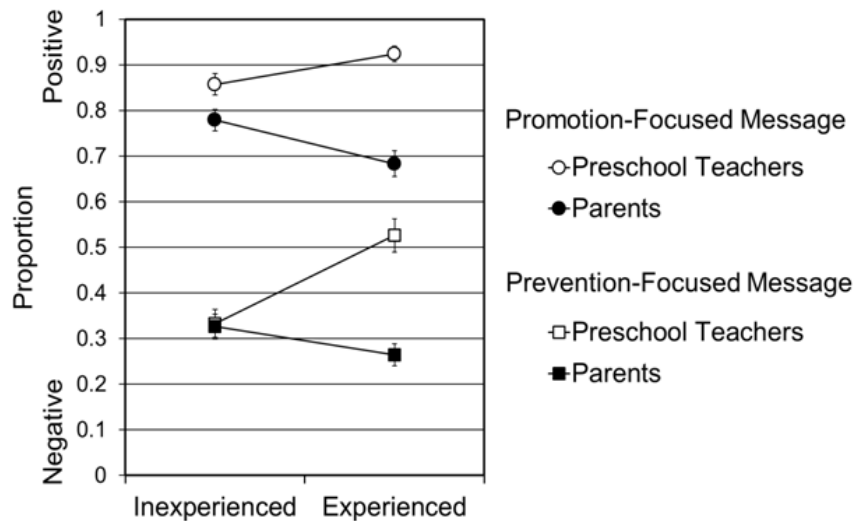


Figure 1. Mean proportion of positively-framed strategies as a function of experience, occupation, and message's regulatory focus. Error bars denote standard mean errors.

To consider how mothers'/teachers' experience related to message selection more thoroughly, we analyzed length of experience as a continuous variable. Significant correlations between mothers'/teachers' experiences and the proportion of positively-framed strategies chosen were seen in both promotion- and prevention-focused message conditions: $r = -.12, p < .05$ and $r = -.14, p < .05$ for mothers and $r = .15, p < .05$ and $r = .21, p < .01$ for teachers, respectively.

CONCLUSION

This chapter extends the findings of previous studies by showing that not only mothers but also teachers of preschool children adopt message strategies in accordance with Higgins's (1997, 2000) theory of self-regulation. Both groups used the positively-framed strategy for providing children with promotion-focused messages and the negatively-framed strategy for prevention-focused messages. These results strengthen the evidence base for Higgins's (1997) theory, including the concept that self-regulatory orientations are developed in children through their experiencing caregivers' messages with a regulatory focus.

More importantly, this chapter reveals the contrasting effects of experience on mothers' versus preschool teachers' message strategies. Although no difference existed between mothers and preschool teachers in the choice of message strategy, the strategy of experienced teachers shifted to a more positively-framed approach, whereas that of experienced mothers shifted to a more negatively-framed approach. The strategies of experienced teachers were more focused on a positive outcome than those of inexperienced teachers, whereas the strategies of experienced mothers were more focused on a negative outcome than those of inexperienced mothers. These contrasts between mothers and teachers suggest that differences cannot be explained by generational differences, which arise, for example, from socio-cultural change. Rather, it seems that mothers and teachers develop their message strategies for a regulatory focus orientation differently; that is, through their parenting and teaching experiences, respectively.

The results of this chapter provide, from a new perspective, suggestions for the development of parenting styles and teaching styles. Previous studies of parenting styles revealed divergent results on the relationship between age and parenting styles; Smetana (1995) suggested that parents become more authoritarian and less authoritative with age, whereas Williams et al. (2012)

found that both authoritarianism and authoritativeness decrease with age. However, combined with Sasaki and Hayashi's (2015) findings that mothers with authoritarian parenting styles prefer the negatively-framed strategy, the present result, which shows that experienced mothers are more likely to adopt a negatively-framed strategy, support Smetana's (1995) data on age-related changes in parenting style. Previous studies of teaching styles demonstrate that novice teachers tend to use controlling and directive strategies (Martin and Baldwin 1993), and that teachers with experience are less authoritarian and more autonomy-supportive (Leroy, Bressoux, Sarrazin and Trouilloud 2007). Thus, the present result of regulatory focus messages, which shows that experienced teachers are more likely to use a positively-framed strategy, is compatible with these previous findings on the development of teaching styles. It is therefore possible that experienced teachers who seek to promote children's autonomy and self-regulation may focus on the positive aspects of the outcome of the behaviors they are trying to induce.

Self-regulation is a construct that has been the focus of intense research in a wide range of domains, including social psychology (Deci and Ryan 1987; Higgins 1997), educational psychology (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan 1991), and developmental psychology (Karreman et al. 2006; Kopp 1982). However, given that there is little interplay between studies in these domains (d'Ailly 2003; Soenens and Vansteenkiste 2005; Vallerand, Fortier and Guay 1997), the present findings about teachers' and mothers' persuasive messages for enhancing children's self-regulation provide important evidence for a comprehensive model of self-regulation. In contrast to the above previous study, the present chapter makes a unique contribution to the interdisciplinary study of self-regulation by directly comparing and contrasting teachers' and mothers' message strategies based on the same problem of regulatory focus messages.

This chapter only examines the viewpoint of the parent and not of the child. Thus, it remains to be investigated whether and how parents' and teachers' regulatory focus messages influence children's self-regulation. According to Higgins's theory (2000), people become more motivated when they "feel right" about the focus of a message. Given this finding, it is possible that children may exhibit self-regulated behavior in response to parents' and teachers' message strategies that are consistent with regulatory focus orientations. Though the present chapter excludes the child's viewpoint, it is noteworthy that it nonetheless parallels Kochanska, Coy, and Murray's (2001) developmental study, which suggested that children's self-regulatory behaviors, based on their fearfulness and effortful control, are based on two

types of regulatory demands from parents, namely “Do” and “Don’t” demands (requesting children to sustain unpleasant, tedious behavior, and requesting them to suppress pleasant, attractive behavior, respectively). Accordingly, in future studies, it will be necessary to investigate the interactive effects between the two types of parents’/teachers’ regulatory demands (i.e., promotion-/prevention-focused persuasion instead of Do/Don’t demands) and the two types of message framing (i.e., positively-/negatively-framed strategies) on children’s compliance with their demands. In a future study, it will be assumed, in line with Higgins’s (1997, 2000) theory, that children are motivated by a positively-framed message strategy for promotion-focused objectives and by a negatively-framed message strategy for prevention-focused objectives.

The present chapter has some methodological limitations. The first concerns our participant sample. To measure changes in message strategy based on mothers’/teachers’ experience, we administered a cross-sectional survey. However, cross-sectional differences in message strategy may not correspond with actual changes in experience for each individual. Thus, a longitudinal study should be conducted to confirm the present results. In addition, this chapter only analyzed data from Japanese mothers and preschool teachers. Previous studies have shown different parent–child interactions between mothers and fathers (Kochanska, Aksan, Prisco and Adams 2008; McBride and Mills 1993) and different parenting/teaching styles between Western and non-Western (Chao, 2000; Lin and Fu 1990; Lu 1997) persons. Furthermore, there is also a possibility that the linguistic characteristics of Japanese may influence a participant’s message selection (Sasaki and Hayashi 2015). Therefore, it is also necessary to examine whether our results can be extended to other samples.

The second limitation concerns framing manipulation. This chapter only used one type of message framing—negative/positive framing—for manipulating a parental persuasive message. The positive frame referred to positive-outcome messages (gains or nonlosses), and the negative frame referred to negative-outcome messages (nongains or losses). However, if applying Higgins’s framework (2000), future studies should adopt eager/vigilant framing: Eager framing refers to gain/nongain situations, and vigilant framing refers to loss/nonloss situations. For instance, when persuading a child not to leave food, an eager-framed message is “If you eat (don’t eat) everything, you will (won’t) grow up,” while a vigilant-framed message is “If you eat (don’t eat) everything, you won’t (will) be sick.” According to Higgins’s theory (2000), an eager-framed message would be

effective for a promotion-focused situation while a vigilant-framed message would be effective for a prevention-focused situation. It must be acknowledged, however, that in this case, the dependent variable is the preference between substantially different messages, whereas in this chapter, the alternatives included messages that were substantially equivalent, excepting mere changes in wording.

A final limitation is that issues related to the measurement of the message strategy were limited to the dimension of specific self-regulation (self-regulatory focus as conceptualized by Higgins 1997). Thus, it may be useful for future studies to extend the findings to more general self-regulation, including emotion regulation, autonomy, behavioral control, and academic effort.

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APPENDIX

The following list represents message selection problems developed in Sasaki and Hayashi (2015) (reproduced with permission of the publisher). For each scenario, participants were asked to either select message A or B. Message A is positively framed and refers to potential gains or to the absence of losses, while message B is negatively framed and refers to potential losses or to the absence of gains. The scenarios were presented in Japanese.

Prevention-focused statements:

- Q1 To a child who loses his/her toys.
 - A) If you clean up your toys, you will not lose your toys.
 - B) If you don't clean up your toys, you will lose your toys.
- Q3 To a child who doesn't like brushing his/her teeth.
 - A) If you brush your teeth, you will not get cavities.
 - B) If you don't brush your teeth, you will get cavities.
- Q5 To a child who wears down the heels of his/her shoes and falls down.
 - A) If you put on your shoes properly, you will never fall down.

- B) If you don't put on your shoes properly, you will fall down again.
- Q7 To a child who doesn't wash his/her hands.
- A) If you wash your hands, germs will go away.
- B) If you don't wash your hands, they will be full of germs.

Promotion-focused statements:

- Q2 To a child who doesn't like naps.
- A) If you take a nap, you will be full of energy.
- B) If you don't take a nap, you will not be full of energy.
- Q4 To a child who leaves food.
- A) If you eat up, you will grow up.
- B) If you don't eat up, you will not grow up.
- Q6 To a child who can't join the other kids.
- A) If you say, "Can I join you?" you will be permitted to play with them.
- B) If you don't say, "Can I join you?" you will not be permitted to play with them.

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