Dyadic Trait Fit (DTF) in Adoptive & Non-Adoptive Families

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Introduction

The Present Study

Building on previous research that provided preliminary support for the theoretical construct of dyadic trait fit (DTF; Koh, Davis, Walkner-Spaan, & Rueter, 2014), the present study tested the effect of dyadic trait fit (DTF) on a communicative family process with adoptive and non-adoptive families. Little is known about how both parent and child traits contribute to child outcomes in the general population. Moreover, examining the contribution of both parent and child traits within the context of a communicative family process that accounts for adoptive status (i.e., adoptive and non-adoptive families) is a novel approach; this study takes such an approach.

The present study answers two research questions: (1) Will parent alienation and adolescent aggression independently elicit a response in the other’s communicative behavior as a partner effect? and (2) What is the effect of dyadic trait fit on the overall family process?

Theoretical Frameworks

• Goodness of fit theory (Lerner, 1993; Thomas & Chess, 1977)
• Person-environment transactional theory (Caspì et al., 1987, 1986; Scarr & McCartney, 1983)
• Family Communications Patterns Theory (FCPT; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a, 2000b, 2004, 2006)
• Actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny & Cook, 1999; Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010)

Participants

Data for this study were from the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Study (SIBS; McGue et al., 2007). Participating families at intake (N = 617) had at least one parent and two adolescent siblings (M = 14.9 years, SD = 1.6). The present study used data from the mothers (M = 45.56, SD = 4.23), fathers (M = 48.23, SD = 4.42), elder (M = 16.14, SD = 1.5), and younger sibling (M age = 13.8, SD = 1.6). In 384 (308) families, the elder (younger) sibling was adopted (International: n = 231 (208), 67% (65%) Asian). In 231 (208) families, the elder (younger) sibling was the biological offspring of both parents. Two adoptive families were removed due to eligibility resulting in a final sample of 615 families.

Conceptual Model

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

Measures

Personality Traits

• Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ; Tellegen & Waller, 2008) – Mother and father self-reported Aggression and Alienation scales

• Personality Booklet – Youth Abbreviated (PBYA; Tellegen & Waller, 2008) – Adolescent reported Aggression and Alienation scales

• Sibling Interaction and Behavior Rating Scales (SIBRS; adapted from the Iowa Family Interaction Scales, Melby & Conger, 2001).

Family Interactions

• Assessed with trained observers’ global ratings of dyadic (e.g. adolescent to mother, father to adolescent, etc.) family interaction tasks from the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Rating Scales (SIBRS; adapted from the Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales, Melby & Conger, 2001). All SIBRS are based on the following scale: 1 = not at all characteristic to 9 = mainly characteristic.

• Communication (conceptualized as conversation-oriented behavior): factor scores of the Warmth (ICCs: .37 to .72), Listening Responsiveness (ICCs: .34 to .63), and Communication (ICCs: .60 to .75) scales

• Conflict: observed scores of Hostility (ICCs: .71 to .73) and Angry/Coection (ICCs: .65 to .67) scales

• Adoption status: 1 = adopted, 2 = not adopted

• Sex: 1 = male, 2 = female

Results

Figure 2. DTF Interaction

Mother-Adolescent Final Step Model

Father-Adolescent Final Step Model

Future Directions

• Present study was cross sectional; future investigations should establish direction of effects.

• Although Koh, Davis, Walkner-Spaan, & Rueter (2014) suggested preliminary support for DTF, this is the first study to demonstrate support vis-a-vis an adolescent aggression X mother alienation interaction effect.

• Future work should test DTF interaction effects between other contributing personality traits.

Discussion

• Overall, findings supported the personality-initiated communicative family process and the study’s central hypothesis.

• Indeed, the dyadic trait fit (DTF) between adolescent aggression and parent alienation had an effect on a family interactive process that explained variance in adolescent conflict.

• Statistically significant mother alienation moderating effects lend further support to the notion that DTF played a role in the transactional family process and in influencing adolescent functioning.

• DTF interaction: Mother alienation moderated the magnitude of the relationship between adolescent aggression and adolescent Conversation (see Figure 2).

• Specifically, high levels of mother alienation had a dampening effect, or weakened, the strength of the relationship between adolescent aggression and adolescent Conversation (see Figure 2).

Adoption Status

• Contributed differently (beyond the proposed process) based on parent-adolescent subsystem.

• With respect to the overall family process...
  a) Adolescent conversation was salient for non-adopted parent-adolescent dyads (such that higher levels of conversation were associated with non-adopted dyads)
  b) Adolescent conflict was salient for adopted father-adolescent (but not mother-adolescent) dyads

Note. See text for detailed explanations of specific results. For detailed comparisons, see Table 1.