

Special topic: Caregivers' evaluations of young children's development and behavior

Guest Editorial

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In this special issue, three studies and a survey article highlight the reliability and validity of caregivers' reports on their children's development and behavior. This topic is significant, as parents, teachers and kindergarten teachers are widely used sources of information in the course of psychological assessment of children. Therefore it is important to look into the psychometric properties of parents' and educators' interviews as well as into standardization of parents' questionnaires which rely on normally developed children and their parents.

Deimann and Kastner-Koller present a study on the accuracy of maternal estimations concerning children's development. They compare mothers with concerns about their children's development, seeking advice at an outpatient clinic, to mothers without the need for educational counseling and mothers who sought advice because of their children's potential high abilities. The results challenge the ability of mothers' to give adequate information in particular when the child's development is delayed.

Willinger et al. focus on the well documented finding that mothers generally tend to slightly overestimate their children's development and investigate the function of this overestimation. The data support the authors' hypothesis that overestimation reduces maternal stress. These findings may be due to (1) maternal defense mechanisms, (2) an attempt to decrease cognitive dissonance, or (3) mothers' feeling as though they are an extended identity of their children. Willinger et al. advise against using mothers as the only source of information on their children's developmental status, particularly with regard to language competences.

Koch et al. investigate the accuracy of kindergarten teachers' estimations and compare them to those of mothers. An analysis of normally developed kindergarten children

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shows a slight overestimation with respect to overall development. A comparison of mothers' and teachers' estimates in a sub-sample of above average developed children showed no significant differences between the two groups of caregivers.

Glascoe and Marks deal with the question of how to interview parents having developmental or behavioral concerns about their children, in order to identify children at risk. As prior findings show the inaccuracy of parents' information, Glascoe and Marks focus on the assessment of parental concerns, which proves to be a reliable screening technique. They provide a survey on the accuracy and validity of parents' concerns about development as measured by *Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS)*, a structured interview to elicit such concerns.

Together, the papers in this special topic provide important ideas in dealing with parents and other caregivers as a source of information. While the use of concerns seems to be a promising perspective for interviewing parents, the studies suggest focusing on risk populations when standardizing parents' questionnaires.

Beate Seibt

Risky and Careful Processing under Stereotype Threat: How Performance is Influenced by Activated Self-Stereotypes

Men can't listen and women can't drive are just two of the many negative stereotypes about groups frequently encountered in our societies. And of course we would like to dismiss them as irrelevant and unfair and stop thinking about them. However, recent research suggests that in test situations, negative stereotypes sometimes act as self-fulfilling prophecies. The prevailing explanation is that the stereotype poses a threat to the individual and thereby induces anxiety. Drawing on Regulatory Focus Theory, the present work offers an alternative account: It is argued that positive stereotypes induce a state of eagerness (promotion focus) and that negative stereotypes induce a state of vigilance (prevention focus).

Accordingly, the present findings indicate that when people are told their group can't perform a task well, they work more slowly but more cautiously, to try to make fewer mistakes. Conversely, when told their group performs well, people are fast but not very thorough. The research further shows that even a stereotype generally dismissed as untrue such as that of the „dumb blond“ can affect a woman's confidence in her own ability. It is concluded that performance on tasks calling for vigilant strategies can even be improved by activated negative stereotypes, or, generally speaking, that the effect of stereotypes on performance depends on the task demands. The present findings are compared to those examining anxiety as a potential mediator of stereotype threat effects.

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