



# Are your emotions under your control or not? Implicit theories of emotion predict well-being via cognitive reappraisal



Ronnel B. King<sup>a,\*</sup>, Elmer D. dela Rosa<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

<sup>b</sup> Central Luzon State University, Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, Philippines

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Implicit theories of emotion  
Implicit theories  
Mindset  
Self-theories  
Well-being  
Cognitive reappraisal

## ABSTRACT

Much of the research on implicit theories has focused on theories of intelligence. The aim of the present study was to examine how implicit theories of emotion were associated with positive and negative indicators of well-being via cognitive reappraisal. College students ( $n = 355$ ) answered relevant questionnaires. Results indicated that entity theory of emotion (thinking that emotions are uncontrollable) was detrimental to well-being. Entity theory of emotion negatively predicted the use of reappraisal. Entity theory of emotion was positively associated with negative emotions, anxiety, and depression, while at the same time being negatively associated with life satisfaction and positive emotions. The effects of entity theory of emotion were partially mediated by cognitive reappraisal. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

*“One can be the master of what one does, but never of what one feels” —  
Gustave Flaubert*

*“He who controls others may be powerful, but he who has mastered  
himself is mightier still” —*

*Lao Tze*

Individuals differ in their beliefs about the controllability of emotions. Some—as epitomized by Gustave Flaubert—believe that people have little control over their emotional experiences, while others—such as Lao Tze—believe that people can gain considerable mastery over their own feelings. Although both beliefs have been expressed by different literary and philosophical figures over the course of history, it is only recently that psychologists have begun to empirically examine the consequences of these beliefs for psychological functioning (Ford, Lwi, Gentzler, Hankin, & Mauss, 2018; Romero, Master, Paunesku, Dweck, & Gross, 2014; Schleider, Abel, & Weisz, 2015; Schleider & Weisz, 2016; Tamir, John, Srivastava, & Gross, 2007). In the current study, we examined how beliefs about the controllability of emotions were associated with well-being and the theoretical mechanisms that could account for these associations.

### 1.1. Implicit theories

Dweck and her colleagues have pioneered research on implicit theories (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 1999; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995). They found that people differ in terms of whether they view personal qualities such as intelligence, sports ability, social skills, and personality traits as either fixed (entity theory) or malleable (incremental theory). Entity and incremental theories occupy opposite ends of the spectrum (Dweck, 2006). Differences in these beliefs are called implicit theories because such beliefs are often implicit rather than explicitly held. Note that the implicit theories literature pioneered by Dweck and her colleagues (1995, 2006) is different from the literature on implicit cognition or attitudes which considers the role of non-conscious processes in social behavior and cognition (e.g., attitudes, stereotypes) (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995).

Individuals who lean more towards endorsing incremental beliefs engage in more flexible, contextual interpretations of events. In the face of challenge, incremental theorists use more adaptive self-regulatory behaviors increasing their odds of success. On the other hand, entity theorists in making internal and stable attributions, fail to employ effective self-regulation thereby leading to failure (Burnette, O’Boyle, Vanepps, Pollack, and Finkel, 2013). The bulk of the work on implicit theories has focused on beliefs about intelligence. Studies have shown that students with an incremental theory of intelligence use more adaptive learning strategies, endorse mastery-oriented goals, exert

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Curriculum and Instruction, The Education University of Hong Kong, 10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, Hong Kong.  
E-mail address: [ronnel@eduhk.hk](mailto:ronnel@eduhk.hk) (R.B. King).

more effort in school, spend more time studying, are more self-regulated and have higher levels of achievement (see Dweck, 1999, for review). Incremental theorists have also been found to be more well-adjusted compared to their peers with entity beliefs and to have higher levels of self-esteem (Diseth, Meland, & Breidablik, 2014; King, 2012, 2017; Robins & Pals, 2002; Schleider et al., 2015).

1.2. *Implicit theories of emotions*

Although most of the work on implicit theories has focused on intelligence, individuals might also hold implicit theories about more transient attributes such as emotions. Tamir et al. (2007) demonstrated that people differ systematically in their implicit theories of emotions. Just like intelligence, some individuals are more likely to view emotions as fixed (entity theory) whereas others view emotions as more malleable (incremental theory).

Tamir et al.'s (2007) study revealed that implicit theories of emotions are linked to both emotional and social adjustment during the transition to college. They found that individuals with an entity theory of emotion experienced fewer positive and more negative emotions, during the initial period of transition to college and this was sustained all the way until the end of the freshman year. In another study, Romero et al. (2014) documented evidence that students who had an incremental theory of emotion had lower levels of depression compared to their peers with entity beliefs. Students who held incremental beliefs about emotions and who started school with lower levels of well-being improved more compared to their peers who held entity beliefs. A more recent experimental study conducted by Kneeland, Nolen-Hoeksema, Dovidio and Gruber (2016) experimentally manipulated students' emotion theories and provided causal evidence that holding an entity theory of emotion led to less effort in emotional regulation (see also De Castella, Platow, Tamir, & Gross, 2017).

1.3. *The present study*

Given the importance of implicit theories of emotion, more work needs to be done in order to examine how they relate to different well-being and mental health outcomes. The current study attempts to build on the emerging work of implicit theories of emotion researchers by examining how implicit theories of emotion relate to a wider range of well-being outcomes. We drew on dual-factor models of mental health which emphasize the importance of including both positive and negative indices of well-being (Antaramian, Huebner, Hills, & Valois, 2010; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001). Much of the early work on mental health has assumed that the absence of negative indicators of well-being (e.g., anxiety, depression) is evidence for a person's well-being. However, research suggests that (positive) well-being and (negative) ill-being though overlapping are distinct from each other (Diener & Emmons, 1984). In order to more accurately understand a person's overall functioning, there is a need to include both positive and negative indices of well-being. Optimal mental health is characterized as a complete state of well-being, characterized not only by the absence of illness or disorder but also the presence of positive factors (Keyes, 2006). We followed this recommendation in the current study and examined both positive (life satisfaction, positive emotions) and negative indicators of well-being (negative emotions, anxiety, depressive symptoms). The goal of the present study was to examine whether implicit theories of emotions are associated with positive and negative indices of well-being and whether cognitive reappraisal could account for these associations. We posited the following hypotheses:

**H1.** : Entity theory of emotion would be negatively associated with positive indicators of well-being (i.e., life satisfaction and positive emotions).

**H2.** : Entity theory of emotion would be positively associated with negative indicators of well-being (i.e., negative emotions, anxiety,

depression).

Aside from examining how implicit theories of emotions were associated with well-being, we also explored whether cognitive reappraisal—a type of emotion regulation strategy—would mediate the effects of implicit theories of emotions on well-being outcomes. Cognitive reappraisal involves construing an emotion-eliciting event in a way that changes its emotional impact (McRae, Jacobs, Ray, John, & Gross, 2012). Individuals with an entity theory of emotion might have less inclination to try to modify their emotions using reappraisal, while those who view emotions as changeable may be more motivated to engage in reappraising emotionally-salient events. Moreover, reappraisal has also been shown to be an adaptive strategy for promoting well-being and reducing ill-being (McRae et al., 2012). Given these findings, we posited the following hypotheses:

**H3.** : Entity theory of emotion would be negatively associated with the use of reappraisal strategies.

**H4.** : Reappraisal would be positively related to positive indicators of well-being including life satisfaction and positive emotions.

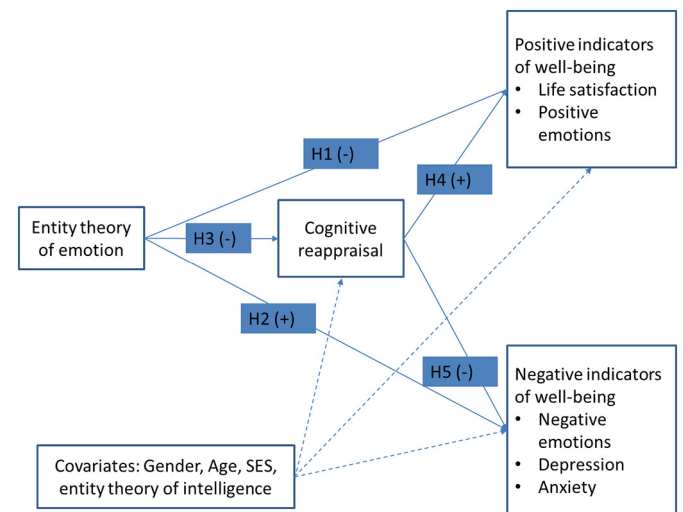
**H5.** : Reappraisal would be negatively associated with negative indicators of well-being including negative emotions, depression, and anxiety.

The theoretical model and the core hypotheses are presented in Fig. 1. In conducting the analyses, we controlled for the effects of implicit theories of intelligence given that the bulk of the research on implicit theories has focused on intelligence and that previous studies have also shown implicit theories of intelligence to be associated with adjustment outcomes (Diseth et al., 2014; King, 2017; Robins & Pals, 2002). Aside from implicit theories of intelligence, we also controlled for other demographic variables such as age, gender, and socio-economic status given that these variables have been shown to be associated with well-being in previous studies (e.g., Diener & Suh, 1997; Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013).

2. **Methods**

2.1. *Participants and procedures*

The study was conducted in the College of Education in a large comprehensive university in the Philippines. The researchers used a snowball technique to contact university lecturers in the college who



**Fig. 1.** Theoretical model depicting relationships among key variables. Note: Solid lines represent the key hypotheses and dotted lines represent the effects of covariates.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11028796>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11028796>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)