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*When Misbehavior Speaks:
Psychological Meanings of Childhood Misconduct and Adult Response*

Chien-Ju Chen

Hsuan Chuang University, Taiwan

Introduction

- Childhood misbehavior is often judged before its motives are understood — adults react to what children do, not why they do it.
- Yet misconduct may signal unmet needs, relational difficulties, or developmental struggles rather than simple moral deficiency.
- How adults interpret and respond to misbehavior shapes whether children learn to reflect and seek help — or hide and escalate.
- **Research question: How do adults interpret childhood misbehavior, and what conditions shape it?**

Research Object & Method

Research Object

Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS)
educational program:

- Screening of Estonian film The Sleeping Beast
- Psychiatrist-led post-screening public forum

Method

- Qualitative textual analysis
- Systematic coding of forum discourse
- Focus on how adults framed childhood misconduct and their own responses

Finding 1

Motives Behind Misconduct

Fear of Punishment

Children concealed mistakes or lied to avoid consequences they experienced as threatening.

Immediate Gratification

Impulsive behavior reflected developmental limitations in self-regulation, not moral failure.

Peer Pressure

Social belonging and acceptance drove children to act against what they knew was right.

Finding 2

Adult Conditions That Intensify Misconduct

Neglect

Emotional unavailability left children without guidance or secure attachment.

Rigid Expectations

Unrealistic standards made failure inevitable and confession dangerous.

Humiliating Language

Shaming responses damaged self-worth and increased secrecy.

Emotional Distance

Cold adult–child relations cut off channels for trust and disclosure.

Finding 3

Understanding Before Correction

- Participants stressed the importance of understanding the motives behind misconduct before correcting the behavior.
- Adults were called on to regulate their own emotions first — reacting in anger was seen as escalating conflict rather than resolving it.
- Correction that begins with curiosity rather than judgment opens space for children to reflect, take responsibility, and seek help.

Conclusion

- Misbehavior is a developmental and relational signal — not simply a moral failing to be punished.
- Children's misconduct is shaped by fear, impulse, and social pressure — and intensified by neglect, rigidity, and emotional distance from adults.
- Adult emotion regulation is a precondition for effective correction — not a secondary concern.
- **Children are more able to reflect and seek help when adults remain calm, available, and willing to understand.**

Thank You

Chien-Ju Chen

Hsuan Chuang University, Taiwan