Handbook of Moral Development

The *Handbook of Moral Development* is the definitive source of theory and research on the development of morality. Since the publication of the first edition, groundbreaking approaches to studying the development of morality have reinvigorated debates about what it means to conceptualize and measure morality in early childhood, how children understand fairness and equality, the evolutionary basis for morality, and the role of culture. The contributors to this new edition grapple with these questions and provide answers for how morality originates, changes, evolves, and develops during childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. Thoroughly updated and expanded, the second edition features new chapters that focus on:

- infancy
- neuroscience
- theory of mind
- moral personality and identity
- cooperation and culture
- gender, sexuality, prejudice, and discrimination.

Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the study of moral development, this edition contains contributions from over 50 scholars in developmental science, cognitive psychology, social neuroscience, comparative psychology and evolution, and education.

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For Rob, Sasha, and Jacob (MK), and Ron, Joshua, and Jeremy (JGS) with love, affection, and gratitude.
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Since it published in 2006, the Handbook of Moral Development has been a major source for information regarding conceptual models and current research on moral development in childhood and adolescence. It has also been the definitive resource for up-to-date knowledge of how individuals acquire morality and the multiple influences on this process. As editors of this Handbook, we have also been amazed at how much the field of moral development has expanded since our Handbook first appeared. We intend for the Handbook to remain the primary source for state-of-the-art descriptions of theory and research on moral development, and it became clear that to do so would necessitate a new edition. This updated volume includes revised as well as new chapters and highlights cutting edge areas of investigation that have become more prominent since the Handbook was first published.

Within the fields of psychology, biology, and sociology, classic works by Freud, Skinner, Piaget, Darwin, and Durkheim have led to various theoretical traditions and research about moral development that continue to this day. Research has focused on children’s developing moral judgments with links to behavior, emotion, empathy, biology, and prosocial behavior. The study of moral development has a long history in psychology, and the current volume reflects the foundation of this field as well as current research.

A number of innovative areas of research have evolved with novel insights and new connections to other areas of research since the last Handbook was published. Further, the expansion of morality beyond the traditional psychological areas of investigations has been important for the field. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the topic of morality, and not just from the developmental sciences. Morality has become a central topic in several fields within the social and biological sciences. For example, economists are examining decision making regarding the fair allocation of resources; social psychologists are focusing on the conditions leading individuals to inhibit negative biases, and experimental philosophers have become concerned with the role of moral judgments in theory of mind. Furthermore, social cognitive and affective neuroscientists have expanded their investigations of the neural processes involved in moral judgments and emotions. All of these trends have been influential in moving the field of moral development forward. This revised Handbook includes chapters that draw on these new areas of inquiry.

The second edition of the Handbook is organized into seven sections and includes scholars from different theoretical perspectives representing different types of research frameworks. Below we summarize the topics and issues discussed in each of the sections of the Handbook.
Preface

**Concepts of Justice, Fairness, and Rights**

The first section of the volume includes three chapters focusing on children’s conceptions of justice, fairness, or rights. The first chapter by Elliot Turiel examines the epistemological basis for studying the development of morality and describes progress in our understanding of developmental changes in moral reasoning. He draws on recent scholarship from across the social sciences and humanities—from moral philosophy, political science, and cultural anthropology—to argue for analyses of reasoning. Accounting for cultural influences, he proposes that moral judgment must reflect understandings of social hierarchies and the practices that are viewed as fair and unfair by members of cultures.

The second chapter of this section, by Judith G. Smetana, Marc Jambon, and Courtney Ball, provides a comprehensive theoretical overview of social domain theory, a well-established social–cognitive approach to moral judgment development. The chapter describes the many avenues of research this theoretical approach has generated in diverse morally relevant areas, provides updates of research on enduring developmental issues, and elaborates on some new and emerging areas of research. The authors argue for the importance of examining children’s identification and coordination of different domains of social knowledge.

The third chapter, by Charles C. Helwig, Martin D. Ruck, and Michele Peterson-Badali, discusses research on concepts of rights, civil liberties, and democracy. The chapter addresses the central issue of whether rights and democracy are uniquely Western notions, or whether these concepts have a broader reach. In answering in the affirmative, these scholars integrate research from the social domain perspective on children’s concepts of rights, civil liberties, and democracy in North America and China, and cross-cultural research on children’s conceptions of nurturance and self-determination rights to provide a comprehensive review. In the next section, research that focuses on the family and the mechanisms of the acquisition of morality is reviewed.

**Socialization, Conscience, and the Family**

The child’s internalization of societal values and standards, the acquisition of conscience, and the family provides a context for moral development. Beginning with Freud, conscience had been a central construct in several different theoretical approaches to moral development, and there has been a resurgence of interest in this concept over the past 20 years. In his chapter, Ross A. Thompson offers an integrative framework that highlights conscience as central to young children’s moral development and as providing the foundations for later social relationships. Thompson’s chapter draws on recent research on emotional development, theory of mind, children’s temperament, and parenting to describe how young children develop moral agency.

The next chapter, by Leon Kuczynski and Ariel Knafo, provides a conceptualization of socialization in the family that stresses the bidirectional, transactional nature of moral socialization and values and children’s active role in the socialization process. They expand their dialectical view to propose a social relational model of internalization that links within-family processes with broader processes of generational and cultural change. In particular, they consider the acculturation of immigrant families.

A historical overview of research by socialization theorists is provided by Joan E. Grusec, Maria Paula Chaparro, Megan Johnston, and Amanda Sherman, who connect earlier
theoretical perspectives to more recent approaches to parenting and moral development. They elaborate on a domain-specific model of socialization that distinguishes among five domains of social relationships: protection, mutual reciprocity, control, group participation, and guided learning, and the different types of socialization practices that are required for development in each of these domains.

In the fourth and final chapter in this section, Judy Dunn provides a compelling and detailed analysis of young children’s social interactions in their families. She draws on her extensive research, which includes videotaped observations of naturalistic family interactions in the home, to provide a window into the development—as well as individual differences in—moral understanding.

**Emotions, Prosocial Behavior, and Aggression**

This section provides a focus on how emotions and prosocial and aggressive behavior play a role in moral development. Researchers who focus on moral emotions and moral reasoning often consider these to provide competing accounts of moral development, but in their chapter, Tina Malti and Sophia F. Ongley bridge this theoretical divide. They review the different traditions in moral developmental research on morality and emotions, and then propose an integrative, synergistic account of the role of moral reasoning and moral emotions in children’s emerging morality.

Amplifying on the theme of moral emotions, Nancy Eisenberg, Tracy L. Spinrad, and Amanda Morris differentiate in their chapter between two central moral constructs: empathy and sympathy. They offer a detailed argument, bolstered by extensive empirical research, for the importance of sympathy (and sometimes, empathy) in the development of children’s other-oriented morality, prosocial behavior, social competence, and the environmental and hereditary origins of empathy-related responding.

Gustavo Carlo’s chapter extends the discussion of empathy to consider the development and correlates of prosocial moral behavior. Like the other authors, Carlo argues against a view of human nature as solely “selfish” or “moral” and asserts that prosocial behavior must be studied using integrative, multilevel approaches. To this end, he provides detailed evidence regarding the contributions of personal and social factors for moral emotions and behaviors, to argue that prosociality is a central aspect of moral development. He includes a treatise on how moral emotions are examined from a cultural perspective.

The final chapter in this section by William F. Arsenio focuses on individual differences in the emotions associated with moral and immoral behavior and associations between moral emotion attributions and aggressive and antisocial tendencies. He provides a cogent argument for the importance of clearly identifying what is *moral* about moral emotion attributions and discusses the role of different forms and functions of aggression, distinguishing between the role of emotion attributions in proactive and reactive aggression.

**Culture, Cooperation, and Development**

Moving from the negative side of morality and a consideration of behaviors such as aggression, the next section focuses on cooperation and culture. Cecilia Wainryb and Holly Recchia’s perspective is grounded in social domain theory, which argues that persons
develop morality through participation in their social interactions. They critique the well-known individualism/collectivism framework and assert that these constructs coexist within rather than between individuals and cultures. Thus, they view cultures as multifaceted environments that enable individuals to debate, reflect, transform, and evaluate the moral implications of social events.

In their chapter, Amrisha Vaish and Michael Tomasello propose that human cooperation is the foundation for moral development. Taking both a comparative and developmental approach, they articulate the “interdependence hypothesis,” in which they chart ontogenetic changes from prosocial behavior to social norm adherence. The authors propose that morality in toddlerhood reflects the emergence of a “second-personal morality,” in which children engage in moral activities that reflect other-ness, such as sympathy, helping, and cooperation. They expand this perspective to make their case for cooperation as the core of social cognition and morality.

Finally, Joan G. Miller and Chloe G. Bland draw from Shweder’s anthropological approach to identify culture as community-specific ideas about the nature of morality. These authors put forward a critical analysis of cultural psychology research on morality and present a core set of assumptions of cultural psychology. Defining morality by culture has implications for issues of intergroup attitudes, which examines how the individual–group relationship relates to psychological phenomena such as group identity and morality.

**Prejudice, Social Cognition, and Intergroup Attitudes**

In this section, the authors tackle moral judgments regarding prejudice, attributions of intentionality, and intergroup attitudes. Reflecting new research that integrates social cognitive development and intergroup attitudes to explain prejudice, these chapters cover both morality and prejudice, as well as morality and theory of mind. In their chapter on gender, sexuality, and discrimination, Stacey S. Horn and Stefanie M. Sinno provide evidence regarding the pervasiveness of discriminatory treatment based on gender and sexual orientation in the United States and throughout the world. The authors argue that individual beliefs about attitudes regarding gender and sexual orientation begin at a young age and continue throughout life. The authors review current developmental research on attitudes, expectations, and interactions related to gender and sexual identity.

Melanie Killen and Shelby Cooley draw from current research on social identity, theory of mind, and intergroup attitudes to provide an explanation for why both morality and prejudice emerge early in development. They argue that moral reasoning enables individuals to reject intergroup attitudes that perpetuate prejudice, but that doing so is complex and requires psychological understanding of others as well as when moral judgments take priority over group identity. The authors review research on prejudice in childhood, and the role that parents play in children’s ability to reject stereotypic expectations and biases. The content areas of focus for understanding morality from this perspective include social exclusion and resource allocation.

In the next chapter, Angela D. Evans and Kang Lee review research on morality, lying, and deception. The authors draw on speech act theory to guide their analysis of the evidence on children and lying. They review research in which they differentiate different forms of lying and actual lie-telling behavior. Drawing on cross-cultural data from North
America and China, the authors argue that the development of the morality of lying involves the integration of both intentionality and conventionality components.

Finally, Kristin Hansen Lagattuta and Drika Weller review research on intersections between morality and theory of mind—connections that have only been systematically investigated within the past decade. The authors review research on children's knowledge of intentions and motives, as well as how understanding about false belief, desires, emotions, and thoughts are related to moral judgment and behavior. These abilities are connected to reasoning about apology, moral status, and trust in testimony. Further, the authors review research on mental states and autism, along with neuroscience and moral judgment. The constructs reviewed in this section are complex from a psychological perspective.

**Precursors to Morality: Cognitive, Neurobiological, and Comparative Approaches**

What are the building blocks of morality? The chapters in this section consider the biological and comparative bases for morality. In their chapter, Paul D. Hastings, Jonas G. Miller, Sara Kahle, and Carolyn Zahn–Waxler review research on the neurobiological bases of empathetic concern for others. Empathy is defined as the recognition and sharing of another's emotional status, and this recognition entails cognitive empathy, which involves comprehension of others’ emotional dispositions. The authors identify different levels of the biological bases for empathy, from behavioral genetics to the molecular level as well as the neuroanatomy and neurophysiology dimensions of empathy.

In the second chapter, Karen Wynn and Paul Bloom describe their experimental studies with infants. Along with their colleague J. Kiley Hamlin, they have documented babies’ preferences for “helpers” over “hinderers,” reflecting a moral preference early in life. The authors believe that their nativist approach has implications for an innate view of morality. Their data to date reveal a moral sense in infancy, one that includes both moral sentiments and moral understanding.

In their chapter, Jean Decety and Lauren H. Howard review new research on the neuroscience of morality, focusing on moral emotions, empathy, and intentionality. Functional neuroimaging studies with humans have shown that, while moral reasoning is underpinned by specific neural circuitry, these circuits are not unique to morality. Rather, they involve communication between regions and systems underlying various affective states, cognitions, and motivational processes. The authors propose that a focus on neurodevelopmental systems is particularly useful, as it allows one to investigate human social tendencies when only some components of, or precursors to, more mature moral behaviors are observable.

Keith Jensen and Joan B. Silk investigate the evolutionary roots of morality in their review of primatology and developmental research. This important line of work provides the basis for claims about what is uniquely human as well as what is part of our evolutionary past. The authors review the evolutionary processes that give rise to altruism and also to punishment and a sense of fairness. While they conclude that behavior resembling morality in nonhuman animals is limited, the findings are mixed. Clearly, some evidence exists for nonhuman animals in relation to other-regarding concerns that motivate prosocial acts in humans, but whether it reflects morality requires further inquiries.
Moral Identity, Community, and the Personal Domain

In this final section of the volume, we move from the biological level to consider moral identity, community, and the development of the person in a moral context. The first chapter in this section, by Lawrence J. Walker, views the study of moral identity as a fruitful way of investigating individuals’ motivation to be moral and examines how individuals incorporate morality as central to their identity and personality. He reviews trait-based, sociocognitive, and personological approaches to moral identity, focusing primarily on its manifestation in late adolescence and adulthood.

The next chapter, by M. Kyle Matsuba, Theresa Murzyn, and Daniel Hart, expands the focus to consider how identity develops in the context of community. They consider moral communities to have shared norms that guide members’ behavior. These scholars present a model of how connections between communities and moral development should be conceptualized, and they offer empirical evidence in support of their model.

Larry P. Nucci’s chapter on the development of personal issues concludes this section, as well as the volume. Nucci defines personal issues as actions that pertain to choice and privacy and that are not matters of right and wrong, and he claims that these concepts exist in a dialectical relationship with both societal norms and social conventions and with moral considerations of others’ welfare and rights. As such, personal issues serve an important function in psychological development. In his chapter, Nucci articulates these theoretical relationships and draws on an extensive body of research to support claims about the emergence of personal concepts in early childhood and across cultures and their associations with adjustment.

Reflections

In sum, the chapters in this volume present many exciting ideas, as well as ongoing debates that have animated the field since its origins. An understanding of children’s morality has implications that extend far beyond academic debate; indeed, the ways we view morality have far-reaching implications for our vision of a fair and just society and how to achieve it. Most current policy discussions and political debates bear on moral development theory, findings, and research questions. While many political debates and social issues—topics such as school segregation, prejudice, poverty, immigrant status, social exclusion, educational achievement gaps, sexual abuse, housing and job discrimination, children’s rights, gender inequity, and civil liberties—clearly fall within the moral domain, there are few outlets for bridging the gap between research and application.

Yet solutions to the vast array of problems that fall within the moral domain involve understanding children’s social experiences, adult attitudes about children’s experiences, and cultural expectations about how these issues should be addressed. We hope that in a few small ways, the research described in this volume may help to provide solutions to the often vexing dilemmas that we confront when making attempts to improve the lives of children. This, in turn, advances the course of society toward justice, fairness, and equality.

This Handbook makes a unique contribution that we believe will be useful to scholars, students, and educators. The volume demonstrates how the field of moral development has expanded greatly over the past 10 years. We hope this Handbook will serve as a resource for professionals, scholars, and graduate and undergraduate students in different subfields in psychology as well as related disciplines.
We are grateful to Elliot Turiel, William Damon, and Lawrence Kohlberg, who were part of charting the foundation of the field of moral development, following Piaget’s groundbreaking book, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932). We feel fortunate to have worked closely with Elliot and Bill, in particular, in our early training in developmental psychology. For her work on this volume, we thank Shelby Cooley, who served as our editorial assistant, for her insights and organizational skills. We thank the helpful assistance from Georgette Enriquez, and the editorial and production staff at Psychology Press/Taylor & Francis Group.

We are grateful for our collaborations with our past and current graduate students at the University of Maryland and the University of Rochester for their inspiration and engagement in the field of morality, and our former graduate student peers at the University of California (both at Berkeley and Santa Cruz) for their discourse and debate about morality in everyday life, including the conversations that occurred at the coffee shops in Santa Cruz and Berkeley. The two editors of this volume met while discussing morality at a café on the north side of the Berkeley campus, and we have fond memories of cappuccino and contemplating the categorical imperative. We thank the wonderful contributors to this volume, who responded to the challenges of writing these chapters with unusual timeliness and enthusiasm and replied to our editorial feedback so gracefully. We greatly enjoyed working with all of the authors and learning about exciting new research areas in the field of moral development.
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Part I

Concepts of Justice, Fairness, and Rights
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In this chapter I primarily address two issues relevant to the development of morality. One is more on the epistemological side than the developmental side, having to do with conceptualizations of the realm of morality. Related to conceptualizations of morality is the question of how to best characterize the psychological functioning of human beings—that is, how perspectives on psychological functioning guide conceptualizations of morality and its acquisition by children. The second issue is more on the developmental side, having to do with how children think (and changes in their thinking) about morality, which must include thinking about other social realms. In those contexts, I consider what we know about processes of development in the moral domain. In addressing these two general issues, I maintain that in many ways they are inseparable from each other.

The approach I take, often referred to as a social domain approach, is based on a large body of research on the ways children, adolescents, and adults form distinct and complexly configured types of thinking in the moral, social–conventional, and personal domains (see Killen & Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1978, 1983a, 2002, 2006b; and several chapters in this volume). The research on domains demonstrates that morality rests on core judgments about welfare, justice, and rights that are considered important and necessary, and that individuals struggle with moral issues in their social lives. A salient feature of moral decisions is that they often involve different aspects of moral considerations in conflict with each other.

Within the social domain framework, it is proposed that the development of morality occurs through children’s reciprocal relationships with adults and other children. It also occurs in the context of dealing with events that include social problems, conflicts, and struggles. People experience societal arrangements, cultural practices, and material conditions that make them aware of inequalities and injustices. An awareness of inequalities and injustices, along with acts of opposition and resistance, are part of most people’s everyday lives (Turiel, 2002).

The propositions just outlined about morality and its development contrast with other psychological perspectives proposing deterministic conceptions of morality and its acquisition based on several factors, including genetics, built-in intuitions, conscience, traits of character or acquired virtues, internalized parental authority and societal values/norms/rules, and commitment to cultural ways (fostering certain ideas, emotions, or intuitions).
Both the ways morality is conceptualized and explanations of development differ between approaches taking the position that morality involves judgments constructed through reciprocal interactions and those taking positions of biological and/or environmental determinism. In this chapter, I first consider the epistemological foundations of morality in the constructive–developmental approach, research on social domains, and concepts of development. I then contrast the constructive–developmental approach with deterministic conceptions of moral development. In the subsequent sections, I consider moral judgments about culture and practices of social inequalities, and then the role of reflection and coordination in moral and social decisions.

**One General Contrast in Psychological Approaches to Morality**

The contrast I have drawn in theoretical approaches represents a fundamental divide in psychological explanations of morality and its development. The most fundamental divide is not about some of the variables often presented as making for divides: reason or emotion, biology or environment, individual or culture—though these variables can be associated with the divide. In my view, the fundamental divide is over whether morality is: (a) part of the ways people actively deal with right and wrong and good and bad in their social relationships, or (b) determined by psychological mechanisms, such as fixed biological dispositions; disembodied conscience or traits of characters; and unexamined adherence to rules, norms, and authority, that reflect how people react and not their concerns with matters of harm, unfairness, injustice, or rights (more about this in the sections that follow). Each of these perspectives provides different explanations of processes of moral development. In the former, development is seen as involving the construction of judgments about right and wrong through children’s social experiences and interactions. In the latter, some take a nativist view of acquisition, and others propose that moral development involves the internalization of values or standards of one’s culture.

**A1. Thought, Emotions, and Morality**

The conception presented in this chapter has as one of its starting points the first approach in the divide, with the view that the development of morality entails and stems from social relationships having to do with social problems, conflicts, and struggles. These include concerns with avoiding harm, benefiting others, issues of physical violence, emotional hurt, exploitation, subjugation, unequal treatment, unfairness, social injustices, upholding rights, violating rights, and—at various group levels, such as religions, nations, ethnicities, communities—issues of prejudice and discrimination, peace, war, genocide, enslavement, and much more. Also of importance are concerns with social justice. As put by the philosopher Vlastos (1962, p. 31): “The great historical struggles for social justice have centered about some demand for equal rights: the struggle against slavery, political absolutism, economic exploitation, the disfranchisement of women, colonialism, racial oppression.” Vlastos regarded these struggles to have occurred throughout history and into the time of his writing in the middle of the twentieth century. Anyone paying attention to political discourse in Western nations knows that such struggles continue into the twenty-first century. Political discourse in this part of the twenty-first century in non-Western
nations includes demands for equality and rights. As discussed later, psychological and anthropological research conducted over the past 30 years or so also documents that in non-Western cultures, there are concerns with subjugation, unfairness in cultural practices of inequality, and efforts to affect social change through opposition and resistance. All of these considerations make for morality as an ongoing part of social relationships, which entails active concerns in everyday life with how people should treat each other.

The assumption that thought is centrally involved in human moral functioning has far-reaching implications for how morality has been conceptualized by social scientists. First, it means that the psychological study of morality requires a good deal of work in ways of defining the realm and ways of distinguishing it from other social realms. To use terms common in Piaget’s theory, epistemological analyses provide necessary guidelines for psychological analyses of human thought (also see Kohlberg, 1971, and Turiel, 1983b). Just as we cannot study thinking about, for example, mathematics, physics, or aesthetics, without knowing about the parameters of those domains, we cannot study morality without definitional bases.

Definitions and conceptualizations of morality are connected to a conception of what is fundamental to human beings. As put by Nussbaum (1999, p. 71), a philosopher and political theorist, “human beings are above all reasoning beings.” Similarly, Sen (2006, p. xiii; see also Sen, 2009) stated, “Central to leading a human life . . . are the responsibilities of choice and reasoning.” In her comment about reasoning, Nussbaum was referring to a core assumption of the “tradition of liberalism,” which is not meant to refer to a political ideology, but rather to a philosophical perspective “in the tradition of Kantian liberalism represented today in the political thought of John Rawls, and also the classical Utilitarian liberal tradition of John Stuart Mill” (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 57). The core features of the tradition, as agreed upon by philosophers like Kant and Mill (as well as many other contemporary philosophers, such as Dworkin, 1977; Gewirth, 1982; Habermas, 1993; Rawls, 1971; and Sen, 2006, 2009) are the following (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 54):

At the heart of this tradition is a twofold intuition about human beings: namely, that all, just by being human, are of equal dignity and worth, no matter where they are situated in society, and that the primary source of this worth is a power of moral choice within them. . . . To these two intuitions—which link liberalism at its core to the thought of the Greek and Roman Stoics—the liberal tradition adds one more, which the stoics did not emphasize: that the moral equality of persons gives them a fair claim to certain types of treatment at the hands of society and politics.

Nussbaum adds that a basic moral premise in these approaches is that each person be treated as an end and not as a means to other goals. Within these views, morality entails substantive considerations of welfare, justice, and rights and is not defined by traditions or the common practices of a group or collectivity (society, culture). For Sen (2009), a theory of justice must be connected with “the lives that people can actually live” (p. 18) and must include “ways of judging how to reduce injustice and advance justice” (p. ix).

Psychological research on children’s social and moral development has yielded a wealth of evidence in support of the propositions that they are reasoning beings and that they reason within a realm that we can label moral about welfare, justice, and rights. One strong indication of this is that starting at a young age, children begin to form judgments entailing distinctions
among different domains of social interactions (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983a, 2002, 2006a, 2006b). The research has shown that children discriminate issues pertaining to harm, benefits to persons, justice, and rights from issues pertaining to the customary and conventional practices of social systems. In turn, the moral and conventional domains are discriminated from arenas of personal choices and jurisdiction. These pertain to realms of activities judged part of individual autonomy and choice separate from welfare and justice considerations and not subject to legitimate conventional–societal regulation. The force and relevance of distinctions that children draw among moral, conventional, and personal matters is exemplified by research showing that those judgments play out in a variety of aspects of social relationships, social interactions in the family and schools (see chapters by Smetana, Jambon, & Ball and by Nucci in this volume), matters pertaining to cultural practices (Wainryb & Recchia, this volume), the environment (Kahn, 2006), social exclusion and intergroup relationships (Killen & Cooley, this volume), aggressiveness (Tisak, Tisak, & Goldstein, 2006), and rights (Helwig, Ruck, & Peterson-Badali, this volume). As discussed in a subsequent section, the development of these different domains of judgment stem from children’s experiences with varying aspects of social relationships and their abilities to perceive differences in types of social relationships.

Another strong indication that humans are reasoning beings is that they apply their moral concepts in flexible ways in particular situations or contexts. They typically weigh and balance different considerations when making decisions and drawing conclusions within the parameters of situations. I refer to such weighing and balancing as a process of coordination (Turiel, 2008b). In many social situations, decision making involves coordination of different and sometimes conflicting moral considerations and goals or between moral and other social considerations and goals. Neither fixed attitudes nor the force of situations determine decisions. Starting in childhood, individuals recognize the different moral and social components and evaluate their relative merits.

The emphasis I have placed on children, adolescents, and adults as reasoning beings, as well as on the discriminations and coordination they make in their moral decisions, should not be taken to mean that emotions play a small role. It does mean, however, that morality is not primarily driven by emotions. It also means that it is not emotions in themselves that guide the formation of judgments about right and wrong. Rather, emotions are embedded in reasoning, with emotions involving evaluative appraisals (Nussbaum, 2001). Moreover, in this perspective, emotions are subject to reflection and critical evaluation. Emotional experiences can inform children’s development of thought and, reciprocally, thinking can inform the development and maintenance of emotions. Moreover, we have proposed that two general sentiments, the sanctity of life and respect for persons, serve as organizing features of moral orientations (Turiel & Killen, 2010). The sentiments of the sanctity of life and respect for persons are likely related to emotions and judgments about harm and welfare that children develop at an early age.

A2. The Development of Multiple Types of Social Thought Through Multiple Social Interactions

The emergence of distinct domains of judgment in early life and their maintenance into adulthood does not mean that such domains of judgment are innate or that changes do not occur with age. As Piaget (1932) noted, the existence of ways of thinking and acting
at 3 or 4 years of age cannot be taken to mean that they have an innate or instinctual source (as had been proposed by H. Antipoff; as cited in Piaget, 1932). Piaget observed that by 3 years of age, children would have experienced many social interactions, including influences from their interactions with adults. According to Piaget, however, adults do not simply transmit morality to children, and they constitute only one aspect of children's social experiences (Piaget, 1951/1995, p. 276):

Socialization in no way constitutes the result of a unidirectional cause such as the pressure of the adult community upon the child through such means as education in the family and subsequently in the school. Rather, it involves the intervention of a multiplicity of interactions of different types and sometimes with opposed effects. In contrast with the somewhat academic sociology of the Durkheim school which reduces society to a single whole, collective consciousness, and its action to a unidirectional process of physical and spiritual constraint, the concrete sociology which the personal and social development of the child obliges us to construct must be wary of sweeping generalities if it is to make sense of the systems of relations and interdependencies actually involved.

Therefore, Piaget maintained that society is not a “single whole” and that it does not produce in its members an adherence to presumed norms of the social system. At the heart of Piaget’s perspective on moral development are the ideas that socialization does not involve a unidirectional cause, that there are multiple social interactions, and that there are systems of relations, and interdependencies. In particular, Piaget proposed that development does not involve an accommodation to the socially permissible, that the multiplicity of experiences influencing development include relations with adults and peers, and that educational and cultural experiences, insofar as they are mainly with adults, can impede the development of morality.

The types of systems of relations and interdependencies considered by Piaget included children’s reciprocal social interactions and relations among thought, emotion, and actions. As is well known, Piaget proposed that there are two major phases of the development of moral judgments corresponding with major types of social interactions. Following a pre-moral period based on regularities, children’s moral judgments are heteronomous and are mainly associated with children’s relationships with adults (parents and others in authority). Heteronomous thinking entails a sense of sacredness of rules, the judgment that they are unalterable, and a one-way, or unilateral, respect for authority. The origins of morality, therefore, are in the sense of obligation stemming from respect for adults and their rules. Heteronomy is an unequilibrated form of morality that can shift with the influences of relationships of greater equality than those between children and adults. Relationships with peers allow for reciprocity and provide the conditions for a shift to autonomous thinking, involving mutual respect and concerns with fairness, justice, and cooperation.

At the autonomous level, children construct an understanding of the nature of rules and laws and reciprocal norms: “Autonomy therefore appears only with reciprocity, when mutual respect is strong enough to make the individual feel from within the desire to treat others as he himself would wish to be treated” (Piaget, 1932, p. 194). By “autonomy,” Piaget did not mean freedom from social or moral requirements. Rather, he meant that
the individual “participates in elaboration of norms instead of receiving them ready-made as happens in the case of the norms of unilateral respect that lie behind heteronomous morality” (Piaget, 1960/1995, p. 315). The idea that children participate in the elaboration of norms is a central part of one of Piaget’s major contributions to explanations of moral and cognitive development. It captures the essence of mental development as a constructive process through the individual’s interaction with the environment and is in opposition to explanations of development as determined either by biologic–genetic traits, intuitions, or by what is ready-made in the environment (e.g., society, culture, ideology, religious precepts).

Piaget’s levels of moral judgment represent a differentiation model of development in that it involves a process of distinguishing judgments about reciprocity and justice from acceptance of the ready-made rules and obedience to authority. In the thinking of young children, the two are confused with each other, so that justice is subordinated to obeying rules and authority. The shift to autonomy, with a transformation of emotions of unilateral respect into mutual respect, brings new conceptualizations of reciprocity, justice, and cooperation (for further details of Piaget’s descriptions of the levels of heteronomy and autonomy, see Piaget, 1932; Turiel, 1983a, 2006b).

A differentiation model of development is also evident in the subsequent structural–developmental formulations by Kohlberg (1971). Kohlberg extended Piaget’s general propositions regarding thought and development while maintaining the idea of differentiations in the process of development in a six-stage sequence of moral judgments. In Kohlberg’s formulation, young children’s moral judgments entail a lack of differentiation of moral values from material value and concerns with punishment (the Stage 1 punishment and obedience orientation) and from the interests and needs of persons (the Stage 2 orientation to individualism and instrumental purpose). According to Kohlberg, it is not until adolescence that morality is based on the need to maintain rules, authority, and the conventional social system (the Stage 4 rule and authority–maintaining orientation, which comes after a Stage 3 orientation to social approval and maintaining good relationships). Moral judgments are then part of emerging conceptions of social systems and respect for the institutionalized laws and authority. It is not until late adolescence and adulthood that moral judgments of welfare, justice, and rights become differentiated from the rules and conventions of the social system (Stages 5 and 6 of “principled morality”).

There is evidence, however, from a large body of research on judgments in the moral, conventional, and personal domains that the differentiation models proposed by Piaget and Kohlberg do not accurately reflect the thinking of children and adolescents. As discussed above, young children form judgments about welfare and justice that are differentiated from punishment, self-interest, authority, and conventions. These domains constitute separate developmental pathways. Levels of thinking within the conventional (Turiel, 1983a) and personal (Nucci, 2001) domains have been identified. A number of studies have shown that young children have better understandings of welfare than justice and that these concepts of justice are better understood by older children (in this volume, see chapters by Helwig et al., Killen & Cooley, and Smetana et al.).

We have undertaken a study (Nucci & Turiel, 2009) to further examine age-related changes in moral judgments (in ages 7 to 16 years). In that study, we attempted to account for different moral issues in different contexts that included situations that did not involve
conflicts with the legitimate interests of self or another person, as well as situations that did involve such conflicts. Participants were presented with hypothetical situations involving three types of acts: helping another in distress (helping a child who had fallen and hurt himself or herself), inflicting physical harm (a child hitting another), and taking another’s property (taking money a child had unknowingly dropped). These acts were depicted in different contexts. In one, there were no competing goals (such as helping not involving any cost to the actor, or hitting for no reason). In a second context, there is a conflict with the goals of the actor (such as stopping to help another resulting in a loss, or hitting for self-defense). A third context involved a conflict with the goals of a third person (such as hitting to protect a third child). An additional feature of the situations is that the characteristics of persons involved in the acts were varied, with victims described as a generic child, a vulnerable child (e.g., a child who has emotional or physical handicaps), and a child who had previously teased the actor (referred to as an antagonist).

We included all these variations to address the propositions that moral judgments are applied in flexible ways, that contextual variations result in different decisions, and that there are continuities across ages in some moral judgments and discontinuities in judgments that require coordination of different aspects of the situations presented. The findings support these propositions. First, we found that the younger and older participants made similar judgments about the importance of helping others in need, avoiding harm, and respecting another’s property when there were no competing interests of self and others. In the unconflicted situations with a generic child as the recipient of the act (e.g., the child being helped or hit), the majority in each age group judged it wrong not to help, to hit, and to keep the lost money. Therefore, the findings show that some aspects of moral decisions develop at an early age and are maintained across ages (i.e., continuities in moral judgments).

At the same time, there were variations in judgments, including variations related to age. For example, variations were found by contexts when the situations depicted conflicts with the goals of self or another. This was most evident in regard to hitting to defend oneself or another—with fewer evaluating hitting as wrong in these contexts (though this was not the case when the child was described as vulnerable). These contextual variations were not age-related.

However, age-related differences were found in several situations. As one example, we can consider judgments about helping when there is a conflict with desired goals for self or another (e.g., stopping to help will prevent the actor or a younger brother from attending an important event). It was found that the group of 14-year olds was less likely, in these situations, to judge a failure to help as wrong than the other age groups, including the 16-year-old group. The younger children (8- and 10-year olds) did not attend to different features of the situation and made one-dimensional or straightforward applications of their judgment that one should help another in distress. The 14-year olds, by contrast, attended to different features of the situation, including nonmoral or personal goals. However, they had some difficulty in coordinating or weighing and balancing the moral and personal considerations in coming to decisions. As a consequence, they sometimes judged that the actor had the right not to help the other because of the costs to the self. The next age group—the 16-year olds—attended to the different considerations and goals and coordinated them by drawing priorities in coming to decisions. They more adequately
coordinated the different situational features than the 14-year olds. This study, along with the studies on domains, shows that throughout development discriminations are made between fundamentally different types of social interactions and social practices associated with systematic but different domains of moral and social judgments. Moreover, these different types of judgments are applied in reflective ways accounting for different features of social interactions.

B. Determinism and Morality—and Its Shortcomings

In contrast with the research discussed thus far, which is grounded in philosophical and psychological approaches focusing on judgments and reasoning that lead to a sense of obligation, psychologists have also attempted to explain morality through psychological mechanisms that fix how people will respond and that are often connected to aversive emotions. In the popular psychoanalytic and behaviorist theories of the first part of the twentieth century, psychologists searched for mechanisms that produce changes involving accommodations to the values, norms, and practices of society (Freud, 1930; Skinner, 1956). In those perspectives, morality is basically a form of compliance (but is sometimes seen as willing compliance) that becomes part of children through the formation of, for example, habits, conscience, or traits of character. In those views, a duality is drawn between the natural inclinations of individuals and social relationships, and, by extension, society. In these views, children’s behaviors must be shaped by socializing agents so that their natural inclinations are displaced by behaviors consistent with societal standards. Children’s development occurs as a consequence of experiences of aversive emotions, especially emotions of fear, anxiety, and guilt.

The force of aversive emotions—with its contemporary incarnation that focuses on the role of the emotion of disgust—is evident in current approaches that treat human beings not as reasoning beings, but mainly as nonrational and as highly subject to nonconscious processes. In those approaches, psychological functioning in most realms is due to affective forces that can be located in areas of the brain, and/or is nonrational and in many ways unknowable to those very people who make moral decisions. Accordingly, morality is not binding because of the force of understandings of justice or the need to prevent harm, but because of nonrational and nonconscious learned habits buttressed by built-in intuitions. As one example, Haidt and his colleagues (2001; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009) have proposed that moral evaluations and actions are based on intuitions of an automatic type that do not involve reasoning and that come about through a combination of evolutionary and cultural influences.

In this perspective, intuitions are intertwined with emotional reactions, and reasoning is relegated to, at best, a secondary status in moral reactions. For Haidt (2001), it is immediate, reflexive reactions such as revulsion, disgust, and sympathy that trigger the response that an act is wrong. The judgment that an act is wrong is more akin to perception: It involves an immediate “gut” reaction without reasoning. Moral intuitions cause “moral judgments” (by which it appears they mean evaluations of acts as wrong). One of the key defining features of moral intuitions is quantitative; they occur rapidly, without effort, and automatically. They also occur without intentionality. Haidt proposed that intuitions are due to evolutionary adaptations shaped by culture. In this view, humans are reasoning beings only in
secondary ways. Reasoning contrasts with intuitions in that it is slow, requires effort, and makes use of evidence. Moral reasoning is also used to persuade and to rationalize.

I have previously (Turiel, 2006a, 2006b, 2010b) provided critiques of this type of intuitionist position, which I will not repeat here (I have also critiqued the neuroscience approach of Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen [2001] that also proposes that morality is based on evolution and relegates rationality to a minor role; see Turiel, 2009). Instead, I summarize that critique as follows:

1. Haidt mainly relied on evidence from social psychological studies in nonmoral realms on biases, intuitions, and emotional reactions for his claim that people's moral judgments are immediate, nonreflective, and do not account for evidence. He does not consider large bodies of evidence from studies in realms like number, classification, space, causality, and others, showing that people make judgments that are not necessarily immediate, rapid, and categorical, and that can be intentional, deliberative, reflective, and involve reasoning. In turn, he does not account for concepts, such as number, arithmetic, and theory of mind, which may be acquired laboriously over time but, once acquired, are applied in rapid fashion. Once those understandings are formed, children and adults use them in an immediate, rapid fashion, which does not mean that it does not involve complex processes of reasoning (see also Turiel, 2010a).

2. There is a reliance on research using a set of unrepresentative and highly unusual actions for generalizations about moral functioning. These include incest involving a consensual decision by a brother and sister to one time have unprotected sex; eating one's dead pet dog; an act of cannibalism in which an assistant in a medical school pathology lab cuts off a piece of flesh from a cadaver that was to be discarded and takes it home to cook and eat; a person masturbates with a chicken and then cooks and eats it. It is mainly from responses of college students to these types of actions that evidence was derived for the proposition that moral judgments are emotionally driven intuitions devoid of reasoning. The claim is that people judge these acts as wrong and cannot come up with justifications for why they are wrong (see Jacobson, in press, for a critique of the methods used in that research and the proposition that people are “dumbfounded” with regard to such situations; also see Kasachkoff & Saltzstein, 2008; Pizarro & Bloom, 2003; Royzman, Leeman, & Barron, 2009). A fundamental problem in this type of analysis is that generalizations are made from responses to such situations to an explanation of morality.

3. There is a failure to provide an adequate definition of morality, and large bodies of research are ignored that provide a good deal of evidence that children and adults maintain complex forms of reasoning in conjunction with emotional appraisal, in coming to moral and social decisions. That research has included acts like inflicting physical and emotional harm, theft, violations of rights, violations of trust, unfairness, social exclusion, prejudice, and discrimination. These are the types of real-life situations that people frequently encounter in their social relationships, which differ fundamentally from the highly unusual and often nonsocial situations of cannibalism, eating dog meat, incest, or sex with animals. Moreover, moral judgments regarding acts of harm, unfairness, and violations of rights, once developed, involve complex types of reasoning that are applied in many situations in immediate, rapid ways.
4. Illustrative historical examples of decisions that appear to be made in immediate rapid fashion can be drawn from southern U.S. states (e.g., Mississippi, Alabama) anywhere between the 1920s and 1950s. Suppose an African American boy who is 15 years old drinks from a water fountain designated “for Whites only.” Large numbers of White people would have had strong, immediate reactions that these types of acts are wrong. Are we willing to say that such responses reflect evolutionary adaptations also reflecting intuitions shared within cultures and yet applicable across cultures? What about the perspectives of those (such as those of African Americans or others who believed such racial discrimination was wrong) who judged that such practices are wrong and should be changed? How does that relate to judgments about incest, if at all?

These types of examples indicate that moral judgments are often more than intuitions; they involve concepts about different groups, social relationships, perspectives on society, and distinctions between when rights should be applied and when they should be denied. This is so, even though many, especially African Americans, would have reacted in a seemingly rapid and unreflective way to these examples by claiming that it is wrong to reserve certain restaurants or water fountains for White people only. Again, those reactions are complex and involve reasoning about rights, fairness, and welfare—as well as about the injustices of the dominance and power exerted by one group upon another.

Deterministic views of morality as emotionally driven fail to account for how people reflect on several dimensions of social situations. Consider as an example a type of act, involving physical harm, which might appear on the surface to fit the idea that moral judgments involve unreflective and immediate evaluations of acts as wrong. Often, people rapidly evaluate as wrong acts like one person hitting another. This would seem to be a clear example of social intuition as the source of judgments of right and wrong. It is not! For children, and even adults, reactions to acts of physical harm are not straightforward. Although children do judge many acts of physical harm as wrong, numerous studies show that they are also readily able to articulate reasons—especially that it is not good to inflict pain, that people do not like to feel the experience of pain. Moreover, they express sympathy and empathy for those who experience the physical harm (see Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Nucci & Turiel, 1978). It may well be that seeing someone brutally beating another evokes emotions of disgust in the observer. However, attributing the judgment that it is wrong to inflict physical harm to the emotion of disgust has it backward. A combination of emotional reactions to events (such as sympathy for the pain felt by the victim) and thought about what is occurring to the person who is victimized (including the formation of judgments that it is wrong, that the observer would not want it done to him or her, and that the victim does not want it to happen) produce moral judgments and evaluations about harm and welfare. In that context of judgments of what is right and wrong and associated emotions, observing the act of inflicting physical harm may, in turn, produce emotional appraisals of disgust (also see Shweder, 2010).

In addition, children distinguish between acts of physical harm that are wrong in some circumstances (e.g., unprovoked acts of hitting) and acts of harm that are justified in other circumstances (e.g., in retaliation for provocations; see Astor, 1994; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Yelli, 2003; Tisak, Tisak, & Goldstein, 2006).
Judgments about acts of hitting demonstrate flexibility of thought as well. For example, research has shown that people distinguish between spanking (which does involve hitting and inflicting pain) and hitting for other reasons (Wainryb, 1991). Whereas the latter is judged to be categorically wrong (because it harms the child), the former is judged acceptable (because it is intended to further the welfare of the child). Judgments about these issues include a variety of emotional and cognitive features that go into the moral decision-making process. In the example of spanking (as well as for issues like abortion, homosexuality, and pornography; see Smetana, 1982; Turiel, Hildebrandt, & Wainryb, 1991), what has been referred to as informational assumptions (Asch, 1952; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987) are involved in judgments about the act (with regard to spanking, it is psychological assumptions about the effects of punishment on learning).

Haidt and his colleagues (Graham et al., 2009) have also argued that morality takes five different forms associated with cultures and with subgroups within cultures. These include moral orientations to harm and care, fairness and reciprocity, in-group and loyalty, authority and respect, and purity and sanctity (borrowing heavily from what Shweder, Much, Mahapattra, & Park [1996] referred to as the “big three” of morality). These orientations supposedly exist because they serve to bind groups together—a criterion mainly derived from Durkheim’s (1925/1961) view that to develop morality, children must come to respect authority and form a sense of sacredness about the social order (see Kohlberg, 1971; Piaget, 1932; and Turiel, 2002 for critiques of Durkheim’s “internalization” views). In part, this scheme reiterates a view of cultural differences between the West (individualism, with an emphasis on harm, fairness, and rights) and the non-West (collectivism, with an emphasis on interdependence, loyalty and obedience, authority, and fulfillment of role obligations).

There is now a large literature with compelling research findings showing that cultures and people in those cultures cannot be characterized in ways that render them as possessing general, homogeneous orientations like individualism and collectivism. These general orientations fail to capture heterogeneity, competing views, and conflicts within cultures and groups, and the fact that people do not typically rely on authority in their moral evaluations (e.g., Gjerde, 2004; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Turiel & Perkins, 2004). Those proposing that cultures can be explained through the individualism–collectivism dichotomy presume that morality is adherence to norms that “bind groups together” and, thereby, ignore a good deal of evidence that groups are not so pristine, that they are not neatly bound together, and that they do not live harmonious lives (Turiel, 2002; Wikan, 1996).

Conflicts and struggles occur because people do indeed reflect on social relationships with their judgments about welfare, fairness, and rights, and because people do value freedom and equality. One of the features of morality that Haidt and others claim is central in binding some groups together is an orientation to authority and hierarchy, including groups that are hierarchically stratified by sex—with males in positions of dominance and females in subordinate positions. The dominance of males and the inequalities in such hierarchical stratification is supposedly binding on these groups because those at the top and those at the bottom all readily accept it. In some analyses proposing that non-Western cultures are collectivistic, for example, social rank is said to be accepted by virtue of the obligation of superiors to protect and provide for subordinates and of subordinates to respect superiors and appreciate that they protect them (Graham et al., 2009; Shweder
et al., 1996). However, a number of studies (discussed further below) in patriarchal cultures have shown that females, who are not granted equality and are subject to the authority and control of males, judge cultural practices as unfair, engage in activities aimed at opposing perceived inequalities and unfairness, and attempt to change the practices of the group. Without actually studying the dynamics of social interactions in such groups and with the assumption that its members buy into their roles in the social hierarchy, some attribute acceptance of and compliance to the system as it exists.

**Culture and the Heterogeneity of Thought: Judgments About Social Hierarchies and Cultural Practices of Inequality**

If development involves the construction of domains of moral and social judgments, we would expect individuals to reflect upon societal arrangements and cultural practices—especially when societal arrangements and cultural practices include injustices and inequalities that restrict the rights of certain groups and not other groups. A common feature of most societies is the existence of social hierarchies. Societies are most frequently structured with relationships of dominance and subordination in regard to, for example, social caste, social class, ethnicity, and gender. Many cultural practices are consistent with hierarchical distinctions in that they involve favorable treatment of groups with greater power or in dominant positions.

A series of studies has examined the ways people who are on the short side of social inequalities react to such inequalities. The studies were conducted in patriarchal cultures, where there are clearly defined roles of dominance for males and subordination for females. Cultural practices in those societies place restrictions on many activities of females and grant males a good deal of control (see Abu-Lughod, 1993; Turiel, 2002; Wikan, 1996). One conclusion to be drawn from these studies is that females in patriarchal cultures do not simply accept the structure of social organization. Some of the studies, conducted among Druze Arabs in Northern Israel (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994), India (Neff, 2001), Colombia (Mensing, 2002), Benin (Conry-Murray, 2009), and Turkey (Guvenc, 2011), examined how adolescent and adult males and females think about designated roles and how females evaluate cultural practices that grant much control to males over females in many activities—such as educational and work opportunities, recreational pursuits, choices of dress, and, more generally, who makes decisions when disagreements occur. One finding of significance for characterizations of such cultures is that the ideas of autonomy, independence, and personal choice (supposedly minimally present in collectivist cultures) are recognized to be part of the culture. Males assert their independence; females are aware that males are granted autonomy, independence, and power, recognizing that they have different roles in the system. However, females also value independence and freedom of choice, but believe that they have to struggle to accomplish such ends. Another finding in these studies is that the large majority of females judged cultural practices of inequality to be unfair. Consistent with these findings, another study showed that Korean girls were critical of parents who granted more autonomy to sons than to daughters and who in other ways treated boys and girls unequally (Park, Lee-Kim, Killen, Park, & Kim, 2012).

Similar findings were obtained in the anthropological studies by Wikan (1996) of people in poor neighborhoods in Cairo and by Abu-Lughod (1993) of Bedouin villagers in
Northwest Egypt. To conduct these studies, the researchers lived in the communities for lengthy times, observing events and interviewing women. Both found conflicts in interactions between males and females, and that women struggled for equality by arguing their cases and by sometimes acting covertly with deception to combat restrictions placed on their lives (including to avoid established practices like arranged marriages and polygamy).

All these findings from the psychological and anthropological research demonstrate that cultural practices promoting inequalities and unfair treatment are not uncritically accepted—even though the practices are traditional and supported by those in positions of power and authority. This is because through the development of moral judgments about welfare, justice, and rights, individuals can step back and evaluate existing social conditions. Such opposition and resistance occur in everyday life and even in close relationships of the family. In addition to the commonalities in moral judgments across cultures, social opposition indicates that within cultures we do not see general acceptance of existing practices. Opposition and resistance in everyday life stand in conjunction with acceptance of many aspects of the social system and social relationships.

The research showing opposition to cultural practices of inequality within social hierarchies has implications for how we think about social and moral dimensions of cultures, as well as comparisons between cultures. First, the existence of different and distinct domains of social judgments means that members of a culture have heterogeneous orientations and, therefore, a culture cannot be defined through a homogeneous orientation. Second, the different perspectives on cultural practices seen on the part of those in lower and higher positions of power and status means that there are variations within cultures. Cultures do not have shared understandings. In some respects (not all), groups of people (e.g., lower status groups) share more perspectives with those of a similar status in other cultures than with groups (e.g., those of higher status) in their own culture. Consequently, it is important to consider multifaceted relations between and within cultures, with areas of between and within culture agreements and disagreements.

Reflection and Coordination: Moral Decisions Often Involve Drawing of Priorities

One of the ways adolescents and adults oppose cultural practices of social inequality is through covert acts that sometimes include the use of deception (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Turiel & Perkins, 2004). As already indicated, social opposition stems from reflections, starting in childhood, on social experiences. Such reflections include scrutiny of existing systems of social organization and cultural practices. The use of deception toward goals of opposing unfairness can involve processes of coordination of different features of social situations.

To understand how moral and social decisions are made, it is necessary to understand the process of coordinating different features of social situations. Therefore, decisions in particular situations can reflect the application of similar moral concepts in varying ways.

Research shows that there are, indeed, variations in the ways basic moral concepts are applied in particular situations and that such applications involve coordination between different moral goals or between moral and nonmoral goals. In particular, research on rights, social inclusion and exclusion, and honesty shows that many decisions involve a
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recognition of the different aspects of social situations, discriminations among them, and deliberative judgments about their priorities. The coordination of different moral goals, as well as moral and other social goals, is evident in the ways individuals approach rights like freedom of speech, assembly, privacy, and religion. Studies conducted in several countries have found that children, adolescents, and adults uphold rights pertaining to freedom of speech and religion in the abstract, and regard them as obligatory norms. In some contexts, however, rights were subordinated to preventing psychological harm (e.g., a public speech with racial slurs), physical harm (a speech advocating violence), and inequality (advocating exclusion). The topic of rights is central to the chapter by Helwig, Ruck, and Peterson-Badali in this volume.

Similarly, decisions about social inclusion and exclusion have been shown to involve coordination of different types of judgment (Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006). The research discussed by Killen and Cooley in this volume shows that in straightforward situations bearing on gender or race children negatively evaluate social exclusion. By a fairly young age, children’s concepts of fairness and equality lead them to judge forms of social exclusion based on gender or race as wrong. However, when judging situations that involve varying considerations (e.g., there is only room for one more person in a group; qualifications for a group activity), then contributions to group goals are used as a basis for the decision even if it means giving preference to someone on the basis of gender or race.

The findings on rights and social exclusion indicate that reasoning, the weighing and balancing of different considerations and goals, and evaluative scrutiny are part of moral functioning. The findings also indicate that judgments about social relationships are multifaceted. Morality is multifaceted in that aspects of harm avoidance, benefits to people, rights, trust, and fairness all coexist. Social life is such that one moral good can conflict with another and individuals are sufficiently reflective to be able to identify different moral goods and the ways they may be in conflict, and to understand the need to draw priorities. Similarly, moral goods coexist with social and personal considerations, and in some situations may require drawing priorities among them.

Research on honesty provides further support and greater detail regarding processes of coordination. Honesty can be and has been viewed as entailing moral obligations. Honesty is often treated as a trait or virtue or responsibility that from a moral point of view must be followed. In that case, it would be wrong to lie or deceive others and good to tell the truth. However, as shown by three studies with children, adolescents, and adults, there are many situations in which most engage in coordination of different goals and subordinate honesty to other moral and social considerations. Systematic evaluations are made of the consequences of telling the truth or engaging in deception to further the welfare of persons, achieve justice, and promote individual autonomy when it is perceived to be unfairly restricted.

The first study, conducted with adolescents (ages 12–13 and 16–17 years), assessed judgments about three types of situations depicting an adolescent who deceives either parents or friends (Perkins & Turiel, 2007). These situations posed the following conflicts between the choice of an adolescent and directives from parents or friends: (a) to act in ways that might be considered morally wrong (i.e., not to befriend another of a different race; to physically confront another who is teasing him or her); (b) directives about issues of personal choice (not to date someone the parents or peers do not like; not to join a
The large majority of adolescents in each age group judged it acceptable to deceive parents about the demands considered morally wrong (on the grounds of preventing injustice or harm). The majority in both age groups also thought that deception was justified when parents interfered with personal choices. However, the older adolescents were more likely to judge deception of parents acceptable than the younger ones (92% versus 62%). By contrast, the majority in each age group thought that deception was not justified with regard to the prudential matters on the grounds that it is within parents’ legitimate authority to place restrictions bearing on the welfare of their children (most thought the restrictions were not legitimate in the case of the moral and personal matters). These findings illustrate how adolescents make discriminations among different situations: between those involving directives to engage in morally wrong acts or to control personal choices and those involving directives about prudential matters. In turn, the findings illustrate that the value of honesty is accepted (as in judgments about the prudential directives and other measures used in the study) but coordinated with moral or personal considerations and goals (and subordinated to those goals).

In this study, it was also found that fewer of the adolescents judged deception of peers acceptable than deception of parents for the morally relevant and personal issues. Although the adolescents thought that the restrictions directed by peers were not legitimate, they were less likely to accept deception of peers than of parents. The difference between how adolescents perceive the acceptability of deception of parents and friends points to another element of the coordination of different considerations in social and moral decision making. The reason that deception of friends is considered less acceptable is that such relationships are seen as based on equality and mutuality, whereas relationships with parents involve greater inequality in power. Because of power differences, most of the adolescents believed it is necessary to deceive parents when they dictate actions that are unjust or when parents attempt to impose restrictions on what are regarded as activities that should be under personal jurisdiction.

One of the reasons we conducted a first study on deception with adolescents is that adolescent–parent conflicts are not uncommon. However, we also expected that issues of honesty and coordination in decision making would be relevant to social relationships among adults and perhaps in childhood. A study, with a similar design as the one with adolescents, was conducted by Gingo (2012) with children from 7 to 12 years of age. Gingo’s study assessed judgments about deception regarding directives from parents and teachers of acts in the moral, personal, and prudential domains. The situations presented the children were designed to be age-appropriate (e.g., cutting in line, choice of friends, climbing a wall at a park). Age differences were found in judgments about deception of parents for the acts in the moral and personal domains. Most of the youngest children (90% of the 7– to 8-year olds) judged deception for the acts in the moral domain unacceptable, with increasing acceptance of deception among the older children (30% of the 9– to 10-year olds and 50% of the 11– to 12-year olds). Similar patterns held for acts in the personal domain. Consistent with the judgments of adolescents (Perkins & Turiel, 2007), the majority of children in each age group judged deception unacceptable for the prudential acts (for each of the domains, similar patterns were found in judgments of deception of teachers but with greater acceptance of deception of teachers than parents).
In Gingo's study, assessments were also made of children's evaluations of the directives from parents and teachers and of depictions of noncompliance with those directives. The large majority at each age negatively evaluated the directives in the moral domain and positively evaluated noncompliance. These findings indicate that, unlike adolescents, children give priority to honesty even though they evaluated the directives not to be legitimate. In turn, the majority of children positively evaluated directives regarding the prudential acts and negatively evaluated noncompliance. These judgments were in accord with their evaluations of deception. Age differences were obtained only for evaluations of directives and noncompliance in the personal domain—with younger children giving more positive evaluations of the directives and more negative evaluations of noncompliance than older children.

The need for coordination in the application of moral judgments to social situations persists into adulthood. Although it was not studied directly, the decisions of females in patriarchal cultures (discussed above) suggest that they were attempting to coordinate fairness and commitments to existing roles within the family as specified in the social system. We have directly studied, in the United States, the judgments of young adults of college age and older married adults regarding deception in marital relationships (Turiel, Perkins, & Mensing, 2009). Participants were presented with hypothetical situations that depicted a spouse who engages in deception in order to act in ways disapproved by the other spouse. The study was designed so that in one condition the husband only works outside the home with the wife engaging in deception, and in another condition the wife only works and the husband engages in deception. In each condition the working spouse is described as exerting power and control over the other. One situation posed a conflict between honesty and a person's physical and emotional welfare (attending meetings of a support group for a drinking problem); the results were unambiguous, showing that the younger and older adults gave priority to welfare over honesty. In that situation, almost all judged deception by a husband or wife to be acceptable. Another situation depicted a spouse who maintains a secret bank account. In that case, it was found that the majority of participants judged it acceptable for the wife to maintain a secret bank account, but fewer judged it acceptable for a husband to engage in such deception even though it is the wife who works and controls the finances. It seems that the more general structure of power in society that grants entitlements to men over women is taken into account in making these decisions. Similar patterns were found for other situations (e.g., seeing a friend disliked by the spouse; shopping for clothes), but the differences between judgments about the activities of husbands and wives were not statistically significant. With regard to one of these situations, the older participants were more likely to judge deception acceptable than the younger ones. It appears, then, that familiarity (or lack of) with the context of the relationship has a bearing on how honesty is coordinated with choices in the personal arena.

Common patterns are, therefore, evident in the studies on deception—as well as other moral concerns like rights and social exclusion. Starting at young ages, flexible judgments are made about matters regarded as morally important. Acting honestly is important because maintaining trust is judged a necessary moral goal. However, maintaining and promoting physical or emotional welfare and combating injustices are also important moral goals. The findings show that across ages these goals are not pursued in mechanistic or
emotionally driven ways. Individuals recognize that conflicts between moral goals need to be addressed and reconciled by drawing priorities in the context of other considerations.

Conclusion

The field of psychology has always seen a tension between explanations of human beings as subject to forces unknown to them that determine their behaviors (e.g., Skinner, 1956), forces that yield irrationality (Ariely, 2008) and sometimes are dark (Freud, 1930), and explanations of mental faculties by which meanings are constructed (Asch, 1952; Piaget, 1932; Werner, 1957). I have tried to show that morality is primarily about ways of approaching social relationships and how people ought to treat each other. People take social relationships very seriously and think about the many problems that occur in social interactions, in how societies operate, and how to accomplish personal and moral ends. I have discussed a good deal of evidence showing that people form complex judgments about social relationships, engage in scrutiny of social situations with reasoning about their features and with discriminations about priorities, and that they engage in moral and social analyses of existing practices.

The origins of moral and social reasoning, as well as of scrutiny of existing social conditions and opposition are in childhood. Children’s social development involves a combination of what can be referred to as cooperative and oppositional orientations. This combination reflects the multiple judgments that children develop. They make moral judgments producing acts of cooperation and helping. Children’s moral judgments also produce acts of defiance or opposition when they perceive unfairness and harm inflicted on themselves or others.

Processes of coordination of different types of judgments demonstrate several key features of moral functioning. These processes demonstrate that part of thinking about social relationships involves concerns with welfare, justice, and rights, but not in ways that they are applied categorically or regardless of competing moral goals or competing social goals. Concerns with a multitude of social issues in complicated social relationships and societal expectations result in the affirmation of rights, fairness, and honesty in some situations and not in other situations.

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A critical task of social development is that children must gain an understanding of the various social rules and expectations that apply in different situations, interpersonal relationships, and societal arrangements. This includes an awareness of the more arbitrary rules and regularities that are specific to particular social contexts or groups (such as whether one eats with forks, fingers, or chopsticks, or whether women are expected to cover their hair or their faces in public), as well as an understanding of the expectations and norms that are more broadly applied because the acts have consequences for others’ welfare or rights (such as not hitting, bullying, or stealing). Children’s experiences of harm and fairness in their interpersonal interactions lead to the development of moral concepts, or their prescriptive, generalizable understandings of how individuals ought to behave toward others. Children’s attempts to make sense of the regularities that organize social interactions in different contexts and social systems, including conventional and group norms, lead to the formation of societal concepts. In addition, interpersonal interactions may lead to the emergence of more descriptive understandings of self and others as psychological beings, which are referred to as psychological concepts. As described in more detail in this chapter, social domain theory is concerned with children’s identification and coordination of these different aspects of social life.

This chapter addresses several central issues in the study of moral and social development. First, a fundamental issue, and one on which different theoretical approaches diverge, is how to define the scope and nature of morality. Social domain theory takes as a given that children—even young ones—actively strive to interpret and make sense of their social world. Furthermore, it is assumed that children’s social interactions and experiences lead to the construction of three developmentally and conceptually distinct forms of social knowledge (moral, societal, and psychological). This approach differs from structural—developmental stage models of moral judgment, which have described moral development in terms of the gradual differentiation of moral principles of justice or rights from nonmoral concerns regarding conventions, pragmatics, and prudence (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Piaget, 1932/1965). Social domain theory also differs from recent approaches which have treated reasoning and emotions as dualities, defining morality as
largely emotional, nonrational, and based on implicit processes (e.g., Haidt, 2001). As Turiel (2010) has stated, “Thought and emotions are not independent pieces of a puzzle . . . [They] are interdependent parts of a whole. Emotions are not so powerful and thinking so weak that emotions dominate reasoning” (p. 557). As described in more detail later, social domain theory views emotions as deeply intertwined with and inseparable from moral reasoning and views emotional appraisals and emotional reactions as part and parcel of moral judgments (Turiel & Killen, 2010).

Much of the early research from the social domain perspective was devoted to empirically testing the notion that children identify and distinguish among different forms of social knowledge. More recent research has focused on how children balance and apply different moral and social concepts to understand different aspects of their social world. This has included children’s understanding of their interactions with parents (including beliefs about parenting, disciplinary practices, and adolescent–parent interactions), peer interactions (including aggression, peer exclusion, and prejudice), social norms (including gender, sexual, and cultural norms), the broader society (including rights, civil liberties, and fair government), and social interactions within cultures (including resistance and subversion). Therefore, as elaborated later in the chapter, social domain theory has provided a rich, compelling, and generative approach to studying children’s thinking about a range of important social and developmental issues.

Foundations, Theoretical Background, and Definitions of Key Terms

Social domain theory draws on philosophical definitions (Dworkin, 1977; Gewirth, 1978; Rawls, 1971) and empirical research to define morality in terms of children’s prescriptive understanding of acts that have consequences for others’ welfare, fairness, and rights (Smetana, 2006, 2013; Turiel, 1983, 2006). According to social domain theory, moral concepts pertain to forms of social interaction that are universally applied (that is, to everyone) and obligatory, impersonal (in that they do not depend on personal preferences), and based on their intrinsic features, such as their consequences for others’ rights and welfare. Researchers have drawn on these definitions to assess children’s criterion judgments, or their ability to identify and distinguish moral concepts along different theoretical dimensions. They have found that moral rules are seen as generalizable across contexts, obligatory (in that individuals are obliged to perform actions or obey rules), inalterable (in that moral rules cannot be changed), and rule and authority independent (in that acts are wrong even in the absence of rules or if the authority views them as permissible). Researchers also have examined justifications, or individuals’ reasons to explain their evaluations of social acts. Moral justifications include concerns with others’ harm or welfare, fairness or rights, and obligations.

But morality is only one aspect of children’s developing social knowledge. Moral concerns with justice, welfare, and rights are seen as developmentally and conceptually distinct from concerns regarding societal arrangements, social organization, and social norms and customs. Social conventions are currently the most extensively studied aspect of the societal domain, although recent research has also investigated other facets, such as group identity and group functioning (see Killen and Cooley’s chapter, this volume). Social conventions facilitate the smooth and efficient functioning of social systems by providing
expectations for appropriate behavior. Drawing from philosophical perspectives (Lewis, 1969; Searle, 1969), conventions are defined as consensually determined uniformities, expectations, or rules that coordinate individuals’ interactions within different social systems (Turiel, 1983).

Like moral concepts, societal concepts are found cross-culturally, but their form and content may vary. Thus, criteria for conventions include judgments that acts are evaluated as contextually relative, agreed upon, contingent on specific rules or authority commands, and alterable. Conventions are typically justified with appeals to authority (including punishment, rules, or authority), social expectations and cultural norms, and concerns with social organization (e.g., the need to maintain social order, avoid disorder, or coordinate social interactions). Conventional transgressions are generally seen as less serious and less deserving of punishment than moral transgressions, but these differences are correlated with domain distinctions rather than formal criteria for distinguishing the domains.

Moral and societal concepts are further distinguished from individuals’ understanding of themselves and others as psychological systems. Over the last 30 years, much research under the rubric of “theory of mind” has examined children’s developing understanding of others’ minds. From the social domain perspective, the psychological domain is more encompassing, going beyond children’s mental state understanding to also include beliefs about self, identity, personal choice, and personality, as well as the causes of one’s own and others’ behavior. (Intersections between theory of mind and moral judgments are discussed in a later section.)

Psychological concepts are distinct from—but related to—the scope and nature of morality. This association exists because rights are grounded in notions of self and personal agency (Dworkin, 1977; Gewirth, 1978), and asserting control over personal issues is one way of exercising agency (Nucci, 1981, 1996). Personal issues pertain to the private aspects of one’s life, such as control over one’s body or the contents of one’s diary, and to matters of preference, such as choice of friends or recreational activities. Personal issues are not judged to be matters of right or wrong; rather, they are seen as up to the individual and therefore not matters of moral concern or conventional regulation. Exercising personal prerogatives and making personal decisions is important in developing one’s autonomy or distinctiveness from others, as it provides opportunities for self-expression, privacy, and identity development.

Prudential issues are also part of the psychological domain and are defined as nonsocial acts that pertain to one’s own safety, harm to the self, comfort, and health (Tisak & Turiel, 1984; Nucci, Guerra, & Lee, 1991; Smetana, 2006, 2011). Prudential acts differ from moral acts in that they have negative consequences for the self rather than for others. Because of their potentially harmful consequences, children’s risky prudential behaviors typically are seen as legitimately regulated by parents or other authorities, even though they only directly affect the individual. But as children grow older, prudential issues (such as drinking alcohol) are increasingly seen as personal choices (Smetana, 2011).

Moral, societal, and psychological concepts each constitute organized systems or domains of social knowledge that arise from children’s experiences with different types of regularities in the social environment and follow separate developmental trajectories (Nucci & Gingo, 2011; Turiel, 1983, 2006). Moreover, they are distinct early in development. Thus, social domain researchers claim that a full understanding and appreciation of
the complexity and diversity of social life must include assessments of moral knowledge as distinct from other types of social knowledge because concerns with others’ rights and welfare (morality), the importance of maintaining traditions and group goals (social conventions), and personal choice, personal entitlements, and autonomy (personal issues) all may coexist in individuals’ judgments.

Moral concepts also may conflict with other moral or social concepts. Much research has examined how individuals interpret and ascribe meaning to complex events and situations that potentially involve different and overlapping concerns with morality, social convention, prudence, pragmatics, or personal issues. For instance, as Nucci & Gingo (2011) have noted, gender norms may be such that males are accorded greater freedoms and privileges than females. Some individuals may view such situations from a single perspective (that is, entirely as a moral issue of fairness or as a conventional matter of tradition, custom, and conventions). Others may recognize both components and be conflicted in their thinking, whereas yet others may be able to coordinate the need for social organization with moral obligations regarding fairness and equitable treatment. These kinds of situations can be seen as multifaceted in that they potentially involve different kinds of social concepts in conflict or in synchrony with each other. Multifaceted issues do not themselves constitute a separate domain of social knowledge, but rather denote areas or issues where the domains overlap.

Multifaceted issues also may involve second-order events, in which a violation of a convention results in psychological harm to others. For instance, research has shown that children view the American flag as a symbolic convention, but they view flag burning as causing psychological harm (Helwig & Principe, 1999). Researchers also have considered situations where individuals interpret the same event as characteristic of different domains (Smetana, 1983; Turiel, 1983; Turiel, Hildebrandt, & Wainryb, 1991). This type of overlap has received a great deal of attention in research on adolescent–parent relationships, as different domain attributions (primarily conventional or prudential versus personal) are the source of a great deal of conflict in those relationships (Smetana, 2011). In these situations, individuals’ reasoning reflects how much they attend to different features of the situation as well as whether they are able to recognize the different components and coordinate them in their evaluations.

Variations in how events are construed also may be due to differences in children’s descriptive understanding of the nature of reality, or their informational assumptions. Informational assumptions come from many sources, including science and religion, and are typically accepted and taken for granted, although the facts may change (for instance, when scientific knowledge advances); differ among individuals, religious or ethnic groups, and cultures (for instance, as in beliefs about effective childrearing practices); and often are highly contested (as in the case of arguments about when personhood begins; Smetana, 1982). Studies by Wainryb (reviewed in Wainryb & Brehl, 2006) have demonstrated that children consistently take into account both moral and factual beliefs when making moral judgments, and these inform their judgments of tolerance, or their evaluations of the legitimacy of beliefs different from their own. Factual or informational beliefs also have been found to inform real-life decision making about controversial social issues such as abortion, through their influence in structuring judgments (Smetana, 1982; Turiel et al., 1991). For instance, research has shown that individuals may view abortion decisions as
moral matters or as personal issues depending on their assumptions about whether or not the fetus should be ascribed full personhood (Smetana, 1982).

Many moral philosophers have claimed that morality should be “overriding” and supersede all other concerns (Scheffler, 1992). However, even moral philosophers have recognized that there are legitimate exceptions to this dictum, due to situational factors or personal goals. For instance, and as described in more detail later, research has shown that adolescents view exclusion from social groups based on gender, race, and ethnicity as wrong from a moral point of view (Killen & Rutland, 2011). However, there are situations where individuals may legitimately prioritize conventional concerns with group functioning over moral concerns with fairness, leading to decisions to exclude individuals from social groups. Likewise, although being honest is generally seen as a moral prescription because lying undermines social trust, there are situations where it is morally preferable to lie (for instance, to protect a potential victim from a murderer). Such examples do not invalidate the notion of morality as prescriptive, obligatory, and generalizable. Indeed, moral philosophers have recognized that in some situations, moral norms may be balanced and coordinated with competing moral norms (as in the example of lying; see Bok, 1978/1989) or with other social concerns (as in the example of exclusion; Dworkin, 1977; Gewirth, 1982). Thus, even when individuals’ moral understanding is well developed, they may actively strive to coordinate—and sometimes subordinate—morality to other types of concerns.

Multifaceted or mixed domain events are the source of much developmental and contextual variability and inconsistency in judgments. That is, the way individuals weigh and coordinate moral and nonmoral considerations in making judgments may vary across individuals, contexts, cultures, and development. Social domain researchers have proposed that an adequate explanation of development must include analyses of how individuals coordinate moral and nonmoral issues in their thinking (Nucci & Gingo, 2011; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2002; see chapter in this volume).

**Current Research**

Research supporting the central claims of social domain theory has been reviewed extensively elsewhere (Smetana, 2006, 2011, 2013; Turiel, 2006). In addition, over the past 30 years, social domain theory has evolved, expanded, and been applied to many different topics, as described elsewhere in this handbook (see chapters by Arsenio; Helwig, Ruck, & Peterson-Badali; Horn & Sinno; Killen & Cooley; Nucci; Turiel; and Wainryb & Recchia in this volume). In this section, we focus on several central issues, as well as some areas of research that have emerged or flourished since the previous version of this chapter appeared.

**Moral Concepts as a Distinct Form of Social Knowledge**

As noted previously, early research from the social domain perspective focused on providing empirical support for the claim that children of different ages identify moral, conventional, and personal judgments using hypothesized criteria. This research focused on evaluations of hypothetical situations that are considered prototypical of the domains.
Thus, in this research, straightforward moral events, such as when one child intentionally hits another child, are presented as not in conflict with other types of goals, motivations, or events.

The developmental origins of morality in the first few years of life have become the focus of extensive research from a variety of perspectives (see Wynn & Bloom; Vaish & Tomasello, this volume). A spate of recent studies have employed behavioral measures such as looking time and reaching with infants or play preferences and allocation of resources with toddlers to examine the early foundations of morality. Results suggesting an early sensitivity to moral harm, a recognition of moral transgressions even in the absence of victims’ distress, and preferences for equitable distribution have led to assertions that moral “intuitions” are evident at very young ages and are, perhaps, innate. These finding are intriguing and compatible with research on children’s emerging moral judgments from the social domain view, but have not yet been connected to well-articulated definitions of morality. The idea that children have innate moral predispositions (for instance, for empathy or avoidance of harm) is fully consistent with the social domain account, as these types of sentiments are viewed as constituting the building blocks on which moral knowledge is constructed (Turiel, 1983; Turiel & Killen, 2010).

Several studies have shown that mothers apply rules, issue injunctions and commands, and respond to transgressions in domain-differentiated ways as early as the second year of life (Dahl & Campos, 2013; Smetana, 1989; Smetana, Kochanska, & Chuang, 2000). In addition, children’s awareness of moral and conventional rules, as evidenced in their social interactions, emerges between 1 and 2 years of age (Smetana, 2006; see Dunn, this volume). Interview studies, which are dependent on children’s emerging language skills, have shown that distinct moral and conventional judgments become evident during the third year of life (Smetana, 1981; Smetana & Braeges, 1990; Smetana, Rote et al., 2012). A robust finding obtained in numerous studies is that by 3.5 years of age, children reliably distinguish moral and conventional events in their evaluations of hypothetical, prototypical transgressions, as well as in their judgments of naturally occurring moral and conventional transgressions that they witness (Smetana, Schlagman, & Adams, 1993). Three-year-olds also distinguish moral and conventional events from personal events, categorizing personal issues as up to the individual (rather than as right or wrong). Preschool children increasingly view events as personal based on personal reasons (reviewed in Smetana, 2006, 2013). The finding that children apply different criteria to their judgments of moral, conventional, and personal events at very young ages strongly supports the proposition that the domains are distinct in development rather than involving a differentiation of one from the other.

In one of the few studies to explicitly examine age differences in young children’s social judgments, Smetana and Braeges (1990) found that primarily White, middle class U.S. children averaging 26 months of age did not distinguish prototypical moral and conventional transgressions on any of the measured criteria, although children who were more advanced in their language skills were more likely to do so. By 34 months of age, distinctions were evident in judgments of generalizability, and by 42 months of age, distinctions were evident in judgments of rule and authority contingency. But these judgments are limited in that they pertained primarily to concrete, familiar events. In addition, preschool children more consistently apply moral criteria to moral events involving physical harm

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than psychological harm and unfairness (Smetana, Kelly, & Twentyman, 1984; Smetana et al., 1999; Zelazo, Helwig, & Lau, 1996). A focus on physical harm is also evident in preschool children’s narrative descriptions of their own moral conflicts (Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005).

Nearly all of the research on moral and conventional judgments in early childhood has been cross-sectional, but in a recent longitudinal study, Smetana and her colleagues (Smetana, Rote et al., 2012) examined 2.5- to 4-year olds’ judgments regarding prototypical moral and conventional transgressions and change in moral judgments across a year. When first assessed, most children judged moral transgressions to be wrong across all of the criteria studied, resulting in little overall growth in judgments except for authority independence. Individual differences related to sex and temperament did emerge, however. Children whose parents rated them as higher in inhibitory (effortful) control and more extraverted (surgent) were more likely to generalize moral rules to different contexts, although children higher in effortful control were also found to grow more slowly in their knowledge that moral transgressions were rule and authority independent. Additionally, girls grew more quickly than boys in understanding that moral rules are inalterable. These findings suggest that while robust domain distinctions are evident early in development, different biological and experiential factors may influence how different moral concepts are conceptualized and consolidated in the early childhood years.

Young children’s social relationships and children’s role in transgressions also affect their moral judgments. For instance, although they still viewed hypothetical moral transgressions as wrong, preschool children treated moral transgressions as more permissible when they involved a friend than a nonfriend (Slomkowski & Killen, 1992), suggesting that children may be more willing to consider mitigating circumstances when friendships are involved. Young children’s judgments also differ as a function of whether they are victims or perpetrators of transgressions. Preschool victims rated actual moral transgressions as more serious and more deserving of punishment than did the violators, whereas transgressors viewed their behavior to be more justified than did victims (Smetana et al., 1999). Wainryb et al. (2005) extended these findings by examining children’s narrative descriptions of their experiences as victims and violators. They found that victims’ accounts narrowly centered on the harm inflicted on them, whereas when narrating experiences as a perpetrator, children tended to focus on a broader range of concerns and emotions. Differences in perspective were evident from childhood to adolescence, although all narratives became more coherent and complex with age.

Moral Judgments and Theory of Mind

Researchers have drawn on the large body of research on children’s developing theory of mind to examine the role of psychological knowledge in making moral judgments (Wainryb & Brehl, 2006). Much research has focused on children’s false belief understanding, or the appreciation that others may have beliefs that differ from reality and one’s own, which develops around 4 to 5 years of age. For instance, Flavell, Mumme, Green, and Flavell (1992) found that children at this age, but not before, grasped that others may have factual, moral, conventional, value, and property ownership beliefs that differ from the child’s own beliefs.
Children’s acceptance and tolerance for beliefs different from their own, however, varies by domain. For instance, Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam, and Lewis (2004) found that 5- to 9-year olds uniformly rejected the notion that there is more than one right belief about moral or factual matters, but they were more accepting of divergent personal preferences (for instance, whether chocolate ice cream tastes yucky or yummy); their acceptance of different personal preferences increased with age. Wainryb and Ford (1998) presented 3- to 7-year olds with hypothetical stories depicting actors engaging in harmful practices on the basis of different moral or factual beliefs. As in Flavell et al. (1992), these researchers found that 3-year olds evaluated all harmful acts as unacceptable regardless of the nature of their beliefs. When children began to understand that others may have different informational beliefs (i.e., false beliefs), however, they were more accepting of unfair practices based on those factual assumptions, while judging acts based on different moral beliefs to be categorically wrong. Thus, coming to appreciate others’ divergent factual beliefs may lead to greater tolerance for different cultural practices but not to moral relativism (Wainryb & Ford, 1998).

Killen, Mulvey, Richardson, Jampol, and Woodward (2011) explicitly examined the influence of false belief understanding, as assessed using standard theory of mind tasks, on children’s judgments of straightforward harm, as well as in situations entailing accidental moral transgressions based on mistaken beliefs (e.g., an “accidental transgressor” who mistakenly throws another character’s property away without knowing). As would be expected, nearly all children treated straightforward, hypothetical moral transgressions as wrong. Children who failed the standard false belief tasks, however, also incorrectly believed that the accidental transgressor had intentionally transgressed. Five-year olds also offered more positive evaluations of the accidental transgressor’s intentions and judged the actor to be less deserving of punishment than did younger children. Only 7-year olds were forgiving of both the transgressor and the accidentally harmful act. Therefore, an understanding of false beliefs appears to be especially salient for children’s judgments of blame and punishment.

These findings are consistent with research showing age-related increases in children’s ability to coordinate intentions and consequences in their moral evaluations (Helwig, Hildebrandt, & Turiel, 1995; Zelazo et al., 1996). Children as young as 3 years of age can distinguish accidental from intentional transgressions when intentions are not confounded with outcomes. However, when evaluating the acceptability of complex hypothetical situations involving harm, children younger than age 7 often give priority to other concerns, such as the consequences of the acts (Helwig, Zelazo, & Wilson, 2001) or other contextual features (Helwig et al., 1995). Indeed, some research suggests that the salience of negative or harmful consequences may lead 3- to 6-year olds to incorrectly attribute negligence to transgressors who are explicitly described as being careful and meaning no harm (Nobes, Panagiotaki, & Pawson, 2009). Therefore, while 5-year olds may understand that others’ beliefs and intentions may differ from their own, they do not fully appreciate intentions as distinct from outcomes and are not always successful at differentiating the representative nature of the mind from reality until middle childhood.

This shift in children’s thinking about mental states also is evident in their evaluations of real-life moral experiences. Wainryb et al.’s (2005) study of children’s narratives of past moral conflicts found that compared to older children and adolescents, preschoolers rarely
referenced psychological phenomena such as beliefs and intentions in their accounts. When they did, younger children focused exclusively on their own wants and desires, leading to less coherent narratives and more categorically negative judgments of both their own and others’ transgressions. In contrast, older children and adolescents included a broader range of mental state information in their narratives. They were able to coordinate their own and others’ perspectives, allowing for more organized narratives and more mixed, nuanced moral evaluations. Psychological language also has been found to be lacking in the narratives of violent youth offenders, child soldiers, and youth with chronic exposure to extreme violence (Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2010; see Wainryb & Recchia, this volume). These findings suggest that the ability to consider one’s own and others’ beliefs, intentions, and emotions facilitates children’s developing understanding of their moral experiences (Wainryb & Brehl, 2006).

Children also may use their moral knowledge to inform their perceptions of others’ minds. For instance, Leslie, Knobe, and Cohen (2006) found that 4- and 5-year olds (but not 3-year olds) were more likely to judge a foreseeable side effect as intentional when the consequences were negative (e.g., making someone sad) rather than positive (e.g., making someone happy). This “side-effect effect” may occur because the presence of harm is particularly salient to young children, leading to a better understanding of the underlying causes of events involving negative consequences.

Recent longitudinal research has shown a bidirectional, transactional association between moral and psychological understanding, at least in early childhood. Smetana, Jambon, Conry-Murray, and Sturge-Apple (2012) found that 2.5- to 4-year olds’ more advanced understanding of others’ mental states, as assessed on standard theory of mind tasks, led to more flexible moral judgments over a year, including ratings of prototypical moral transgressions as less deserving of punishment and less independent of authority. (Although this seems contradictory to our definition of morality, comments made in the interviews suggest that children are beginning to grapple with mitigating circumstances.) However, moral judgments of permissibility and authority independence also led to more advanced theory of mind understanding over time. These findings are consistent with the notion that children construct prescriptive notions of right and wrong as well as an understanding of others as psychological agents from their social interactions (Carpendale & Lewis, 2010; Turiel, 1983; Wainryb & Brehl, 2006). Given the salience of negative events to young children (Vaish, Grossman, & Woodward, 2008), moral experiences may provide unique opportunities for children to learn about others’ minds, facilitating the development of both psychological knowledge and moral evaluations.

Although psychological and moral knowledge appear to be interrelated, an understanding of other minds is not necessary for all moral judgments. For instance, it may not be needed to judge whether causing obvious pain to another is wrong (Zelazo et al., 1996) or to evaluate whether moral issues are prohibited in different contexts (Smetana, 1985; Smetana, Jambon et al., 2012). This may explain why children are able to identify and evaluate prototypical moral and conventional violations before they understand that others may have different beliefs. Indeed, children with autism are able to successfully distinguish moral and conventional transgressions despite failing standard false belief theory of mind tasks (Blair, 1996).
Neurological Correlates of Moral Judgments

Several recent studies have examined cognitive and neurological correlates of moral and conventional judgments. For instance, Lahat, Helwig, and Zelazo (2012) examined 10- and 13-year olds’ and college students’ cognitive processing of moral and conventional rule violations and neutral acts, as assessed using reaction times and event-related potentials (ERP). As in other studies, participants judged moral violations as unacceptable whether or not there were rules and conventional transgressions as acceptable only when there were no rules. More importantly, children made faster judgments of the acceptability of moral than conventional transgressions when there were rules governing the acts, and adolescents made faster responses than children. This suggests that the cognitive resources required for making moral and conventional judgments differ (as reflected in reaction times), underscoring that different domains constitute distinct systems of thought. Furthermore, as brain development and executive functioning continue to develop with age, children and adolescents are increasingly able to notice and attend to multiple concerns, which can then be more effectively coordinated into sophisticated moral judgments. As described below, cognitive and neural processes presumed to underlie the ability to identify the domains also have been investigated in individuals with specific neurological or cognitive deficits.

Morality and Emotion

Social domain theory views emotions and moral judgments as reciprocal processes that cannot be disentangled. This view differs from emotivist or intuitionist approaches to morality, which are principally based on research with adults and give priority to emotional and implicit processes while eschewing reasoning as largely post hoc rationalizations (Cushman, Young, & Hauser, 2006; Greene, 2001; Haidt, 2001). From the social domain perspective, this treatment of emotions and reasoning as distinct, opposing influences represents a false dichotomy (see Turiel, this volume, for an extended discussion). Rather, the assumption is that affective experiences are an important component of moral judgment and that the latter involves a complex integration of thoughts, feelings, and experiences. To borrow from Kant’s (1855/1999) famous dictum, moral reasoning without emotion is empty; emotions without reasoning are blind. Children’s affective experiences influence their understanding, encoding, and memory of moral transgressions and are part of a complex evaluative process (Arsenio & Lover, 1995). Information obtained from observing the affective consequences of acts for others, as well as past or immediate emotional responses to moral situations, may constitute the foundation on which moral understanding is constructed.

Research has shown that moral and conventional transgressions elicit different types of responses from peers and adults (see Smetana 2006, 2013, for reviews). For instance, observational studies in the home and at school have shown that parents and teachers focus on the emotional repercussions of moral transgressions for victims, emphasizing the consequences of harm or unfairness for the victim and encouraging transgressors to take the victim’s perspective. Additionally, the victims of moral transgressions respond with emotional reactions like crying, which serve to highlight the harmful ramifications
of transgressions. In contrast, when responding to conventional transgressions, authority figures appeal to rules and social order, and at least until middle childhood, other children rarely respond. Thus, the emotional consequences for victims influence children’s evaluations and responses to transgressions.

Arsenio’s program of research (see Arsenio, this volume) provides additional support for the assertion that children use affective information when judging social transgressions. His research indicates that different emotions are associated with different types of transgressions. In early and middle childhood, moral events are evaluated as affectively negative, whereas conventional transgressions are viewed as affectively neutral. Children also effectively use information about what others are feeling to infer whether events are moral, conventional, or personal (see Arsenio & Lover, 1995). Highly arousing moral events may be considered “immoral” in part because they are more affectively salient than less arousing events.

Although children of all ages consistently attribute negative emotions to the victims of transgressions, the majority of young children are “happy victimizers” and attribute positive emotions (e.g., happiness) to transgressors (Arsenio & Kramer, 1992). Around 6 years of age, children begin to attribute conflicting emotions to victimizers (e.g., happiness due to the gains resulting from the behavior as well as negative emotions due to their understanding of their victim’s plight). Furthermore, moral judgments of rule and authority independence and generalizability have been associated with fewer happy victimizer attributions in 7- but not 9-year olds (Malti, Gasser, & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010). While studies of happy victimizers have focused mostly on children’s judgments of hypothetical transgressors’ emotions, young children also attribute positive emotions to transgressors in actual moral conflicts they have witnessed (Smetana et al., 1999). Additionally, observational research suggests that preschoolers often display positive emotions (as well as negative emotions such as anger) when engaging in aggressive acts toward others (Arsenio, Cooperman, & Lover, 2000; Arsenio & Killen, 1996) and in interview studies focusing on judgments in actual situations (Smetana et al., 1999).

Arsenio and Lover (1995) proposed that with age, and as a consequence of positive peer relationships, normally developing children shift from viewing victimizers as feeling happy to focusing on the negative consequences for the victim. This transition helps to explain the apparent inconsistency between young children’s relatively sophisticated moral evaluations (at least while focusing on victims) and the frequency of moral misbehavior in early childhood (because children also focus on the gains achieved through victimization). Indeed, more negative emotion dispositions have been shown to predict greater aggressive behavior and less peer acceptance over 1 year (Arsenio et al., 2000). In this view, stable individual differences in children’s peer relationships combine with developmental changes to influence children’s moral understanding.

Social domain research has not directly considered the role of emotions such as guilt, empathy, sympathy, and personal distress, or children’s ability to regulate emotions in making judgments. But Arsenio’s research program has shown that a concern for others, along with other emotions evoked by moral violations, may help children make distincively moral evaluations. This view is supported by research examining whether empathic concern and the ability to correctly identify emotion cues are associated with moral and conventional judgments in adult patients with frontotemporal dementia (fvFTD; Lough
et al., 2006). FvFTD is characterized by inappropriate social behavior, loss of empathy, and difficulty in understanding complex tasks. Compared to controls, individuals with fvFTD did not differentiate between the permissibility and severity of moral and conventional transgressions and displayed deficits in their comprehension of emotions (e.g., low ratings of empathic concern and impairment in their ability to recognize emotions of anger and disgust). These findings further highlight the potential role of emotions in identifying and differentiating moral versus conventional events.

**Coordinations Between Moral and Other Social Concepts**

As noted earlier, much recent social domain research has focused on children's and adolescents' judgments about multifaceted situations. In these studies, children's judgments about situations involving conflicting concerns have been compared with judgments about prototypical or single-domain events (e.g., Helwig, 1995; Turiel et al., 1991). In multifaceted situations, different components vary in their salience, and judgments about conflicting events reflect domain coordinations rather than a general failure to distinguish moral and conventional concepts. Studies of domain coordinations have provided a compelling way of understanding individuals' reasoning about a range of topics, some of which are described below.

**Morality and Intergroup Attitudes**

A long-standing question that Killen and her colleagues have addressed in her extensive program of research (reviewed in Killen & Rutland, 2011) is how intergroup attitudes, exclusion from social groups, and prejudice emerge in development. Their research has shown that across ages, children and adolescents view straightforward, unambiguous acts of exclusion based on gender, race, and ethnicity as morally wrong. Yet, in more ambiguous or complex situations, conventional and psychological reasons are sometimes invoked to justify exclusion, and in some cases, prejudicial attitudes. Killen and her colleagues also have investigated young children's ability to coordinate morality and social conventions in the context of intergroup attitudes. For instance, studies have examined whether 4.5- and 5.5-year olds give priority to fairness or social conventions in deciding who to include in hypothetical gender-stereotypical play situations (Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim, & Ardila-Rey, 2001), and school-age children's decisions to prevent harm versus continue a task necessary to maintain a group activity (Killen, 1990). In these studies, children evaluated prototypical situations (e.g., straightforward exclusion or a prototypical moral transgression) to be wrong, based on moral concerns. Judgments of multifaceted situations, however, were considerably less consistent.

Killen et al. (2001) found that, based on conventional reasons, younger preschool children chose to include the gender-stereotypic child more often than did older children. Additionally, when asked to reconsider their choices following probes focusing on different reasons than their original response (i.e., those who chose to include the nonstereotypic child were probed with conventional concerns and vice versa), children changed their decisions more when probed regarding moral concerns with fairness following conventional choices than the reverse. Thus, changes in judgments depended on whether a
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A moral point of view was being advocated. Children were not always able to simultaneously consider the competing demands of the situation, but they were able to weigh multiple considerations (and typically give priority to morality) when different perspectives were introduced.

This research has been extended to examine majority (European American) and minority (African, Asian, and Latin American) 9- to 15-year-old children’s evaluations of reasons for exclusion in interracial peer contexts (Killen et al., 2007). All children rated race-based exclusion as wrong based on moral reasons (unequal treatment), but with age, children increasingly differentiated between race-based and non-race-based reasons (such as lack of shared interests, parental discomfort, and peer pressure) for exclusion. When reasons for exclusion did not focus on race, minority children rated interracial peer exclusion as more wrong than did majority children. These findings highlight the complex intersection of individuals’ experiences, context, and type of concern in influencing judgments.

Morality and Rights

Another complex issue has to do with the question of whether children and adolescents view rights violations as wrong using moral criteria. A well-developed program of research on children and adolescents’ conceptions of rights, laws, and civil liberties (see Helwig, Ruck, & Peterson-Badali, this volume) has shown age-related trends as well as variations in judgments that reflect conflicts between abstract concepts and how those principles are applied in complex situations. Conceptions of rights and civil liberties appear to develop early in the elementary school-age years, at least in North American children. Six-year olds view freedom of religion and speech as universal rights that should be upheld in all cultures, although their justifications are based primarily on appeals to freedom of expression and personal choice. By middle childhood, children reason about the broader cultural or societal implications of those rights (Helwig, Ruck, & Peterson-Badali, this volume; Neff & Helwig, 2002). With age, children are increasingly able to coordinate different principles and concerns in their social judgments. For instance, one study found that Canadian 12- and 16-year olds and college students viewed freedom of speech and religion to be universally applicable and not contingent on existing rules or laws in both decontextualized and contextualized situations. Adolescents were less likely to affirm rights, however, when freedoms conflicted with other moral concerns with harm (particularly physical harm) and equality. Adolescents subordinated rights to moral concerns such as preventing harm or promoting equality. Early adolescents were also more likely than older youth to view issues of equality as overriding civil liberties and less likely to uphold civil liberties when they conflicted with a law (Helwig, 1995).

The studies suggest that compared to early adolescents, older adolescents are better able to integrate and coordinate their understanding of laws restricting civil liberties with concepts of rights. Furthermore, how children applied rights in different social contexts differed with age. In middle childhood, children made few distinctions between the rights of children and adults or between rights applied in family, school, and the society at large (Helwig, 1997, 1998). With age, adolescents considered agents’ maturity or mental or physical competence and increasingly differentiated between rights that should be accorded to children versus adults and the rights applicable in different social contexts.
Similar age trends have been obtained in non-Western contexts, including studies of Druze Arab early and late adolescents and adults (Turiel & Wainryb, 1998) and in related research on democratic versus authority-based decision making in China (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2001).

Morality and Sexual Identity

Social domain theory also has provided new ways of understanding children’s developing sexual identity and sexual prejudice. Horn and Nucci (2003) have found that older adolescents’ and young adults’ reasoning about sexuality, and in particular, homosexuality, is multifaceted and includes concerns with rights and fairness (moral issues), social conventions and norms, and personal issues, as well as informational assumptions about the natural order of the world. Yet, studies examining adolescents’ beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuality (see Horn & Sinno, this volume, or Horn, 2008, for a review) show that American 10th and 12th graders and college students are able to separate their attitudes about homosexuality from their beliefs about the fair and equitable treatment of gay and lesbian youth. Horn found that although only a minority of the participants in two large samples believed that homosexuality was permissible (with a sizable proportion viewing it as wrong), nearly all students viewed excluding, teasing, or harassing gay or lesbian peers as unacceptable based on harmful or hurtful consequences or individuals’ rights to be treated with respect.

Gender, Hierarchy, and Inequality

Coordinations of moral, conventional, and personal concepts also have been examined as a function of individuals’ position in the social hierarchy and in the context of gender relationships (Turiel, 2002). In cultures where gender relations are strongly hierarchical, individuals in subordinate roles (for instance, wives in marital relationships or females more generally) may experience greater restrictions in their choices and freedoms as a function of their social position, as well as inequalities in the way power and resources are allocated and opportunities are made available. Individuals higher in the hierarchy (e.g., husbands or, more broadly, males) are accorded more power, authority, decision making, and personal prerogatives than females, leading to variations in moral and social judgments (Neff & Helwig, 2002; Turiel, 2002).

Studies conducted in India (Neff, 2001), Benin, West Africa (Conry-Murray, 2009a, 2009b), and among Druze Arabs in Israel (Turiel & Wainryb, 1998) generally have shown that males are granted more personal autonomy and entitlements and have fewer restrictions placed on them than do wives or daughters, and that females are expected to fulfill interpersonal duties based on gender norms more than are males. At the same time, though, judgments in these different cultures show many exceptions to these norms. Acceptance of gender norms typically was more common among those in dominant positions (e.g., males more than females), and their reasoning generally reflected concerns with norms and traditions, but females were more likely than males to deliberate on and challenge the fairness of those norms based on moral concerns. When women decided not to oppose the traditional conventional order, their judgments were based on conventional reasons.
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(such as the importance of traditions or the need to adhere to authority or cultural norms) but also pragmatic concerns regarding the possibly deleterious consequences of doing so.

These findings are not restricted to individuals in non-Western contexts. Studies examining U.S. children’s and adolescents’ judgments of gender-differentiated roles and expectations have yielded comparable findings. For instance, Sinno and Killen (2011) found that 10- and 13-year olds applied moral reasoning more when considering working fathers’ than mothers’ parenting (e.g., “second-shift” parenting). Children considered second-shift parenting more unfair for fathers than mothers and used more social–conventional reasoning (for instance, that “double-duty” parenting works well for the family) when considering mothers than fathers. Early adolescents considered the fairness of family arrangements more than did younger children, who focused more on personal choice or societal expectations.

Adolescent–Parent Relationships

Extensive research has examined adolescents’ and parents’ beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority and adolescents’ obligations to disclose to parents, as well as reasoning about adolescent–parent conflict and adolescent disclosure and secrecy with parents (Smetana, 2011). This research indicates that there are inter-individual as well as intra-individual coordinations in moral and social domains of reasoning. Although the popular view is that intergenerational conflict occurs over political and religious beliefs and values (see Smetana, 2011, for a review), in fact, conflicts typically occur over where the boundaries between parents’ legitimate parental authority to regulate children’s behavior and children’s personal jurisdiction should be drawn. Thus, except for parental intervention in sibling disputes, which generally either involve issues of fairness and equality or invasions of the personal domain (Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2010), moral issues are rarely implicated in adolescent–parent conflict. With age, teenagers claim increasing personal jurisdiction over issues that parents see as conventional or prudential, leading to conflict and negotiation in adolescent–parent relationships, as well as increases in nondisclosure and secrecy (Smetana, 2011).

These studies also indicate that adolescents coordinate moral concerns about honesty with other issues and, as noted previously, view deception and lying as acceptable in some circumstances. Indeed, judgments about lying may vary according to the domain of the issue and type of relationship involved. For instance, Perkins and Turiel (2007) studied U.S. early and late adolescents’ judgments regarding lying to avoid a moral injustice, a prudential harm, or a personal choice in the context of peer and parent–adolescent relationships. Nearly all adolescents viewed it as acceptable to lie to parents to avoid unfairness, and the majority viewed it as acceptable to assert personal choices when they were seen as unfairly restricted in the context of unequal power relationships (e.g., between parents and children), but not in the context of peer relationships, where there is no power differential.

Furthermore, a recent study assessing adolescents’ and parents’ ratings of the acceptability of different strategies for keeping information from parents found that although both viewed deceptive strategies (such as telling parents only if asked, omitting important details, avoiding the topic, or lying) as relatively unacceptable, adolescents viewed them as more acceptable than their parents (Rote & Smetana, 2012). For prudential issues like
drinking alcohol or texting while driving, both parents and adolescents viewed telling only if asked as the most acceptable strategy, followed by avoidance and omitting important details, and, least of all, lying. Parents made these same distinctions in evaluating the acceptability of not disclosing multifaceted issues (like staying out past curfew and what teens post on Facebook) and personal issues (like how free time or allowance money are spent), but adolescents viewed all of these alternative nondisclosure strategies as more acceptable than lying. This reflected their attempts to balance their desires for greater autonomy with preserving their relationship with parents.

**Implications for Moral Development**

Throughout this chapter, we have referenced age-related changes in children’s understanding of moral concepts and their application to multifaceted situations. In our view, both are implicated in and important for understanding moral development. Below we provide a more integrative summary of the developmental trends that have emerged from research.

Social domain theory views moral understanding as constructed through social interactions and building on predispositions toward empathy and a concern for others that are evident in infancy. Domain-differentiated interactions with parents and siblings have been found in the second year of life. Our studies show that rudimentary distinctions in children’s moral and social judgments, as assessed on theoretical dimensions, are evident by about age 3.5 and more consistently by age 4, particularly regarding concrete, familiar, observable events pertaining to physical harm.

By age 5, there is evidence that children begin to coordinate moral and other concepts, leading to more complex and flexible moral evaluations. For instance, by this age, children come to understand that others’ beliefs and intentions may differ from their own, and shortly thereafter, they become better able to coordinate emotion knowledge with their moral judgments. They shift from focusing on the feelings of happiness achieved from victimizing to prioritizing the negative consequences of moral transgressions for the victim. Although fewer studies have examined coordinations in moral and conventional concepts prior to adolescence, the available evidence (Killen et al., 2001) suggests that by about 5 years of age, children are able to balance competing moral and conventional considerations if they are made evident but that they have difficulty generating and simultaneously considering those competing concerns.

Although there has been less research on how moral and psychological knowledge intersect in middle childhood and adolescence, there is some evidence to suggest that advances in children’s moral thinking may be due in part to children’s growing ability to consider mitigating circumstances and others’ intentions, motivations, and goals. During the elementary school years, children acquire a more sophisticated understanding that victims’ behavior in response to moral transgressions (for instance, when victims do not show visible signs of distress, such as in situations of compliance or subversion rather than opposition or resistance) may not accurately reflect their psychological states or internal feelings (Shaw & Wainryb, 2006). Children also become less accepting of hypothetical transgressions that are described as provoked by others and view retaliation as less morally justified. Smetana, Campione-Barr, and Yell (2003) found that fourth graders condemned
retaliation using moral reasons more than first graders did, although all children viewed “in kind” retaliation as more acceptable than retaliation that is greater in magnitude than the original offense. When narrating past experiences as a victim rather than a perpetrator (Wainryb et al., 2005), elementary school-age children were more likely to describe harm as intentional and the perpetrator as wanting to harm or anger them. In contrast, perpetrators typically described their behavior as a response to provocation. With age, however, children more frequently referred to misunderstandings, mitigating circumstances, and negligence, leading to more subtle and complex moral judgments. The use of within-subjects designs in these studies provides compelling evidence that differences in victims’ and perpetrators’ responses reflect different perspective on situations rather than pervasive and consistent individual differences.

During middle childhood, children develop the ability to extend their moral concepts beyond a focus on specific personal experiences, familiar events, and instances of concrete harm and others’ welfare to more abstract and unfamiliar social events (Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983). Similar trends have been observed in studies of children’s evaluations of hypothetical events as well as in children’s retrospective narrative descriptions of their own moral transgressions. Thus, Wainryb et al. (2005) found that in their narratives, elementary school-age children no longer focused exclusively on physical harm and included a broader range of moral conflicts (like exclusion, offensive behavior, or injustice). Their narratives also became more coherent and complex with age.

During adolescence, concepts of fairness become more broadly comprehensive, universally applicable, and generalizable across situations. At the same time, however, adolescents become better able to take situational variations into account (Nucci, 2001; Nucci & Gingo, 2011). Nucci and Turiel (2009) examined the development of children and adolescents’ reasoning about situations involving moral concerns with either helping someone in need or refraining from directly or indirectly harming another person, which were depicted as in conflict with the actor’s self-interest. As studies of younger children have amply demonstrated, nearly all children and adolescents judged it wrong to harm another in straightforward situations. Along with others (Damon, 1977), Nucci and Turiel found that concepts of fairness shifted in early adolescence from a focus on direct equality to a coordination of equality with equity and then a concern with equity, or an understanding that fair treatment involves a consideration of individual differences in needs and statuses.

With age, children also increasingly took situational variations into account. The ability to integrate divergent aspects of situations showed a U-shaped pattern of moral growth from late childhood through adolescence. Adolescents were better able to consider numerous aspects of moral situations, but there were periods in which moral criteria were applied unevenly. In particular, as early adolescents attempted to establish boundaries of personal jurisdiction, they overapplied conceptions of rights in morally ambiguous contexts. Older adolescents were better able to distinguish personal choices from conceptions of rights and to coordinate the different facets of multifaceted moral situations.

A similar U-shaped pattern of growth was found in a recent longitudinal study of adolescents’ perceptions of the government’s right to intervene in or regulate potentially risky behaviors (Flanagan, Stout, & Gallay, 2008). Both cross-sectional and longitudinal results revealed that middle adolescents were less likely than early or late adolescents to believe that society had the right to control individuals’ involvement in risky behaviors.
Like Nucci and Turiel (2009), these researchers found that middle adolescence was characterized by an overextension of the personal domain and a strong commitment to personal rights as a basis for making decisions. Reflecting advances in thinking, however, late adolescents coordinated their beliefs in individual rights with an understanding of the role of government to constrain individuals’ rights in the interest of a larger public good.

Thus, these studies show that children’s concepts of welfare and fairness become more sophisticated with age. At the same time, there are complex patterns in their application to situational contexts. Children do not always prioritize moral concepts over social conventions, prudence, pragmatics, or personal issues. All this suggests that social domain theory is consistent with recent attempts to outline a developmental systems (Lerner, 2006) or relational meta-theory of development (Overton, 2006) that views mental processes as “emergent, epigenetic, embodied, enacted, extended, embedded, and encultured” (Overton, 2012). In other words, the moral, societal, and psychological domains can be seen as self-regulating, organized systems of knowledge that include judgments, actions, and emotions. These integrative systems of social knowledge interact in dynamic and reciprocal ways, leading to the emergence of new, increasingly complex systems of thought. Because relational systems are “encultured” (that is, biological systems are embodied and develop in sociocultural contexts that may offer different affordances), these newly emerging systems of thought are situated and contextualized—while they also have some generalizable features.

**Directions for Future Research**

The earlier version of this chapter (Smetana, 2006) concluded that social domain theory provides a powerful and nuanced way of conceptualizing the coexistence and intersection of concerns with justice, welfare, rights, social conventions, traditions, authority, personal choice, and personal entitlements among individuals and between cultures. This conclusion is still applicable today. Much progress has been made in our understanding of moral judgments in straightforward situations and in a variety of multifaceted situations and contexts, yet additional studies using longitudinal designs are needed to tease out age-related changes in children’s understanding and coordination of different moral and social concepts. In particular, research is needed to better understand how morality is either prioritized or subordinated in different situational contexts at different ages. Additionally, more work is needed to connect findings regarding infants’ moral predispositions with the development of their moral and social judgments. Research using novel methods is needed to tap social domain judgments in younger children.

In light of the ongoing debates regarding the role of intuitions versus reasoning in everyday moral decision making, there is a need for more empirical research on the interrelationships between emotions and moral judgments, particularly on the role of positive emotions such as sympathy, empathy, and respect. Developmental research has been largely absent from discussions about the role of intuitions on judgment (e.g., Haidt, 2001). This is surprising in light of the fact that many of the rapid, seemingly intuitive decisions and actions made by adults often have their origins in developmental processes involving conscious and deliberate thought and reflection occurring during childhood and adolescence (Smetana & Killen, 2008; Turiel, 2010; Turiel & Killen, 2010; see Turiel, this volume).
In addition, there has been considerable research on the role of emotions such as guilt, empathy, or sympathy in other areas of moral development (see Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Morris, and Malti & Ongley, this volume); this research could be fruitfully integrated into the social domain view to help elucidate how different emotions animate and inform the early development and processing of moral judgments.

Social domain research has focused primarily on normative patterns and age-related shifts in children and adolescents’ moral and social judgments, to the relative neglect of individual differences. Our understanding of both normative and problematic pathways in development may be increased and broadened by further consideration of how differences in social experiences and individual characteristics influence individuals’ moral and social judgments and actions. For instance, Arsenio, Adams, and Gold (2009) have usefully distinguished between the emotional and attributional biases that are associated with reactive versus proactive aggression. Wainryb and Pasupathi (2010) have begun to unravel the complex effects of children’s exposure to political violence on moral development and their sense of moral agency. More generally, research on different types of social relationships (friendships and enmities), social experiences (e.g., being excluded) and social groups (e.g., being part of marginalized groups or in-groups versus out-groups) could be productive in broadening our understanding of moral development. Research on situations of inequality or discrimination (involving biases according to gender, racial, social class, or sexual preferences) has both theoretical and applied relevance.

Finally, social domain theory has been particularly useful in understanding how different forms of social knowledge are applied and balanced when individuals deal with complex, real-life events or situations. As science and technology advance and social interactions take on new forms (such as online interactions), it would be worthwhile to examine how these experiences influence moral and social judgments and behaviors. For instance, in a recent study, we examined college students’ evaluations of the moral, conventional, and personal dimensions of illegal music downloading (Jambon & Smetana, 2012). Social domain theory offers an important perspective on these emerging issues. More research also is needed on the processes that connect moral judgments and actions; to this end, it may be particularly productive and interesting to focus on situations where moral judgments are not aligned with actions. As the field moves toward a more relational, dynamic conception of human development, social domain theory provides a powerful and useful framework for understanding how individuals evaluate the moral, conventional, and psychological aspects of their social lives as they unfold in different cultures, social contexts, and social groups.

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Introduction

In his book, *The Idea of Justice*, the economist and Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen identifies the paradoxical position that the idea of human rights seems to occupy in contemporary discourse (Sen, 2009). On the one hand, he says, there is “something very appealing in the idea that every person anywhere in the world, irrespective of citizenship, residence, race, class, caste or community, has some basic rights which others should respect” (p. 355). This idea has inspired a contemporary “Rights Revolution” (Ignatieff, 2000) and has been used to combat injustices of a variety of sorts (e.g., torture, arbitrary imprisonment, racial and gender discrimination, hunger and poverty) around the world (Chatterjee, 2008). Evidence of the universal appeal of human rights may be seen in the endorsement of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) by nations with different political and cultural systems. The recent demonstrations and revolutions throughout the Arab world, with a concomitant call for wider democratic reforms and guarantees of human rights in those societies, further attest to the widespread appeal of these ideas.

On the other hand, philosophical and legal scholars continue to debate whether the concept of human rights can be given a rational foundation (see Sen, 2009, for a discussion and defense of the idea of human rights against common criticisms). Some have even charged that human rights and democracy are “Western” cultural notions that are largely incompatible with other cultural traditions, values, or belief systems (Panikkar, 1982; Zakaria, 1994). Questions about the universality and rational basis of human rights also are reflected in contemporary psychological theorizing about morality. Some theorists (e.g., Haidt, 2012; Shweder et al., 2006) have identified distinct moral codes believed to be given varying priority in different cultural contexts. The “ethics of autonomy,” on which concepts of human rights, freedom, and democracy rest, is believed to be dominant in the largely secular, “individualistic” societies of North America and Europe, in contrast to other moral codes (e.g., “collectivism”)—held in many societies in Asia and Africa—that give greater priority to hierarchical social role obligations, authority, or conformity to the requirements of a divine natural order (Jensen, 2008; Shweder et al., 2006). It is claimed...
that from the perspective of other societies, “Western insistence that people should design their own lives and pursue their own goals seems selfish and dangerous—a sure way to weaken the social fabric and destroy the institutions and collective entities upon which everyone depends” (Haidt, 2012, p. 100). A proponent of a perspective known as “social intuitionism,” Haidt has expressed skepticism about the rational basis of moral concepts themselves—including rights and autonomy—holding the view that moral reasoning merely reflects after-the-fact arguments employed to support emotionally based and culturally determined moral conclusions.

Are rights and democracy uniquely Western notions, and therefore limited in their appeal, or do they, in at least some aspect, have validity and currency beyond Western cultural traditions and peoples? Commentators on both sides of the issue frequently claim to know what people think and believe without directly consulting the available empirical evidence. In this chapter, we will report the results of a body of research conducted over the last 20 years that challenges some of these criticisms of human rights and democracy. We will argue that concepts of rights and freedoms emerge in development and reflect children’s reflections on universal human needs and purposes and the structure of the social institutions within which they conduct their lives. We will draw on models of social development that propose that individuals develop distinct moral concepts of rights and democratic participation early in childhood, and coordinate their reasoning about these ideas with other features of social situations in increasingly sophisticated ways throughout development. Ideas about human rights and democracy arise in a variety of cultures and social contexts, and these notions are sometimes used to critically evaluate existing social practices that unduly restrict individual autonomy or how people may participate in the social institutions that affect them. Findings will be presented from recent research suggesting that concepts of rights, freedoms, and democratic participation are not only held as important by people from diverse cultures, but that their instantiation in social life and institutions has relevance for people’s psychological well-being around the globe.

The Development of Reasoning About Rights

A large body of research has been conducted over the last 25 or more years investigating children’s, adolescents’, and adults’ conceptions of rights and freedoms. These concepts were explored by examining the general criteria by which children and adolescents reason about these concepts, such as their independence from authority or laws, and how concepts of rights and freedoms are applied to a variety of situations, including both conflicts of different types and in more straightforward situations (Helwig, 1995a; Helwig, Yang, Tan, Liu, & Shao, 2011; Lahat, Helwig, Yang, Tan, & Liu, 2009). Although a principle aim of this research has sought to determine whether children and adults understand rights as independent of authority, customs, or existing laws, this perspective also acknowledges that rights are applied in context and are not the only issue relevant to people’s social and moral judgments (Helwig, 1995a, 1995b; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987). Moral philosophers have argued that genuinely held concepts of rights may be legitimately overridden by other concerns in some circumstances (Dworkin, 1977; Meldon, 1977). Thus, rights are not absolute, and a complete picture of people’s understandings of rights must take into account both the conceptual basis of rights concepts (e.g., as universal, human, or “natural
rights,” or as contingent on social customs or laws) as well as how and when rights are applied when in potential conflict with other concerns, including other moral concepts such as issues of harm or fairness or community traditions and values.

One line of research, conducted within the “social domain” approach (see also Turiel and Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, this volume) has explored children's understandings of personal issues, areas over which children are believed to have personal decision-making autonomy. Conceptions of rights as freedoms have been connected to the development of an area or domain of personal autonomy over which persons, including sometimes children, are judged to be free from the interference of other individuals or authorities (Gewirth, 1978; Nucci & Lee, 1993). The personal domain is postulated to reflect universal psychological processes involving needs for autonomy and the construction of a self or personal identity (Nucci, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Studies with American children and adolescents (e.g., Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1989) have found that rules by authorities restricting or prohibiting children from making their own decisions about matters such as choice of friends, recreational activities, and appearance (e.g., hairstyles or choices regarding clothing) are judged by even young children to be wrong or illegitimate. These judgments are typically justified by references to children's desires or needs for personal choice or autonomy, or by explicit appeals to their rights. Children and adults are more likely to grant personal decision-making autonomy to children over a broader set of issues as they get older, reflecting the role of judgments about children's developing competence to handle greater autonomy over wider areas of their lives. This process, however, is often characterized by disputes, disagreements, and conflict between children and adults, as children (especially in adolescence) often attempt to claim personal autonomy over issues that parents still view as within their discretion (Smetana, 1989).

The development of conceptions of personal autonomy would be expected to be a prerequisite for the formulation of more abstract concepts of freedoms or civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and religion. One line of research (Helwig, 1995a, 1997, 1998) has examined American and Canadian children's and adolescents’ conceptions of freedom of speech and religion by presenting participants with a set of general questions about freedoms (along with their applications in a variety of different situations). As in the social domain research on personal issues, the general questions were meant to assess criterion aspects of concepts of freedoms, such as whether these rights would be seen as moral rights (Gewirth, 1978) and judged to be universal across cultures and, correspondingly, whether general legal restrictions placed on these rights by governments would be viewed as wrong. The findings of these studies indicate that, across a wide age range (6 years to early adulthood), concepts of freedom of speech and religion were held as moral or “natural” rights independent of authority and laws and generalized across cultural contexts (everyone should have freedom of speech or religion).

The kinds of rationales used to support freedom of speech and religion were diverse and showed developmental differences throughout early and late childhood (Helwig, 1995a, 1998). Younger children (6-year olds) tended to support civil liberties mostly by appeals to personal choice, suggesting that they link rights like freedom of speech and religion to their developing notions of a personal sphere at an early age. Both older and younger children also justified freedoms by explicit appeals to human nature—including needs for self-expression and autonomy—that were believed to be thwarted by undue restrictions.
on these rights. However, beginning around 8 years of age, children also began to perceive broader societal, cultural, and democratic implications of these rights. For example, older children saw freedom of speech as fostering communication among individuals that could lead to societal innovations, or they perceived it as an important means by which societal injustices could be corrected through enabling individuals to voice their concerns in protests or petitions (Helwig, 1998). As children develop a more sophisticated concept of the political sphere and the possibilities of different types of political action, their understanding of the value and function of civil liberties is enhanced. Freedom of religion, by contrast, was seen by older children and adolescents not only as a matter of personal choice but also as a way in which people could express their diverse identities within a shared group tradition. However, at no age in these studies were children’s conceptions of civil liberties found to be defined by authority, existing social rules or laws, or culturally specific forms of social organization.

Consistent with the proposition that general concepts of rights need to be distinguished from their applications in different types of situations, this research also has explored how rights are applied in context. For example, Helwig (1995a) investigated the reasoning of 7th and 11th graders and college students about a variety of situations that included straightforward applications of rights (e.g., an individual giving a public speech critical of the government’s economic policy), as well as those that involved conflicts between civil liberties and other social and moral issues (e.g., a speech that contains racial slurs or advocates violence, or in religious rituals in which psychological or physical harm was inflicted on consenting participants). Participants at all ages in Helwig’s study (1995a) applied these concepts to straightforward situations and rejected government laws or restrictions on exercising civil liberties as wrong, and they also applied freedoms in some, although not all, conflicts. They were especially inclined to argue that civil liberties should not be given priority in situations in which physical harm was seen as a likely consequence. There were also age differences in whether or not freedoms were seen to override certain conflicting issues. Younger adolescents were more likely than older adolescents to support restrictions on civil liberties when they conflicted with issues of equality, as in speech advocating exclusion of low-income people from political parties, or in the case of a religion that prohibits low-income people from holding important positions in the church. Younger adolescents also were more likely than older adolescents to judge that it was not acceptable to exercise civil liberties when this was prohibited by hypothetical laws—even though they judged these restrictive laws to be wrong and unjust. It appears that evaluations of laws restricting civil liberties and judgments of compliance to these unjust laws become better integrated and coordinated in individuals’ reasoning with development (Helwig, 1995a).

The same general pattern of endorsement of rights and freedoms in some situations but subordination of rights to other social and moral issues in other situations has been found in other cross-national studies. Clemence, Doise, de Rosa, and Gonzalez (1995) investigated judgments of rights in Costa Rica, France, Italy, and Switzerland. Participants ranging in age from 13–20 years were presented with a set of situations and asked to judge whether each constituted a violation of human rights. Some situations, such as imprisoning individuals for protesting against the government or discrimination against ethnic minorities, were judged to be human rights violations by the majority of individuals in all countries. In other situations (e.g., government tapping of phone conversations,
capital punishment, or laws requiring that individuals with infectious diseases be admitted to hospitals), concern for community welfare or issues of law and order were judged to override individual rights and freedoms.

In sum, the above findings illustrate the importance of separating different dimensions of judgment in studies of reasoning about rights and civil liberties, including accounting for similarities and differences in judgments of rights in the abstract and in contextualized situations of different types. By directly examining the role of criteria believed to define the moral domain (e.g., universality and noncontingency on laws and authority), several aspects of reasoning about civil liberties and rights were identified that appear to be continuous across development in childhood and adolescence. These include the conceptualization of civil liberties as universal rights believed to be independent of social convention and law, and their association with substantive rationales that historically have been invoked to justify and support these rights in philosophical and political theorizing (Emerson, 1970). At the same time, although individuals have been found to apply these rights in many situations (both straightforward situations and in conflict with other issues), they sometimes subordinate rights to other social and moral concerns, including issues such as compliance with laws and conflicting moral norms and values, such as avoidance of harm and the unequal treatment of individuals. Thus, this research demonstrates both a genuine understanding of, and commitment to, civil liberties among individuals across a variety of ages coupled with the recognition that civil liberties are not the only social and moral concern operating in individuals’ moral judgments (Helwig, 1995a; Helwig & Turiel, 2002).

These findings also help to account for some perplexing and rather pessimistic conclusions reached by older research on rights conceptions. Global stage theorists such as Kohlberg (1981) and Melton (1980) have argued that young children do not possess truly moral or universalizable concepts of rights. Instead, children (and even most adults) are characterized as holding a conventional or preconventional perspective in which rights are seen as deriving from power, authority, or existing laws. In part, this conclusion stems from the finding that basic rights such as the right to life often were not endorsed in the face of opposing laws when these rights were presented in the context of complex moral dilemmas (as in Kohlberg’s Heinz dilemma). Moreover, when asked directly to explain where rights come from, participants, including young children, frequently cited law, authority, or power (Melton, 1980). These conclusions are overdrawn, however, due to the failure to separate concepts of rights in general or in straightforward situations from applications of rights in more complex situations entailing conflicts with other moral and social concepts, such as prevention of harm, discrimination, or abiding by important laws.

Instead, the overall pattern of results obtained in the extensive research on rights we have reviewed is consistent with models of social reasoning that postulate the early differentiation of domains of social and moral concepts, such as morality and social convention, and their interrelation in increasingly complex ways throughout development (Helwig, 1995b; Turiel, 2002). This perspective, commonly termed the “domain approach,” postulates that children construct multiple forms of social understanding through their encounters with different types of social experiences. These understandings include moral conceptions based on a concern with justice, fairness, and harm, as well as social–conventional conceptions based on authority, tradition, and explicit social rules and customs and psychological
beliefs about the competence of agents to exercise specific types of rights. According to this perspective, the reasoning of individuals cannot be described in terms of a global or central tendency to emphasize one form of social reasoning over the other at different points in development (Kohlberg, 1981). Rather, individuals will give priority to different concerns depending on a variety of factors, such as the particular features of situations that are perceived to be salient and the way that different types of conflicting concerns are coordinated at different points in development (Helwig, 1995b; Neff & Helwig, 2002; Turiel, 2002).

**Distinguishing Different Types of Rights: Self-Determination and Nurturance Rights**

In the scholarly and empirical literatures, a distinction has been made between two types of rights, broadly categorized as nurturance and self-determination rights (Rogers and Wrightsman, 1978; Ruck, Abramovitch, & Keating, 1998), which serve different but important functions in children's lives (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008). Children's rights declarations, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), reflect the importance of both types of rights to children's development and well-being. Nurturance rights, sometimes referred to as “protection” and “provision” rights, pertain to the obligation of others in society (e.g., parents) to provide for and safeguard children's emotional, psychological, or physical welfare. Examples include parental provision of food and clothing, protection from abuse and harm, and emotional support. In contrast, children's self-determination rights correspond broadly to those types of personal freedoms, discussed earlier, that give children some measure of control or choice over areas of their own lives. Examples include the right to privacy, freedom of expression or religion, and to vote, or to choose one’s friends and recreational activities. The distinction between nurturance and self-determination rights is relevant not only in terms of legal and social policy; research conducted over the past several decades indicates that children conceptualize the two types of rights differently and these differences have both theoretical and practical implications.

Evidence that children think in distinct ways about nurturance and self-determination rights is apparent both in survey research (e.g., Rogers & Wrightsman, 1978) as well as in studies that examine the reasoning used to support individuals’ endorsement of a position on a rights issue. With respect to endorsement, children's rights to nurturance receive strong support from children, adolescents, and adults (Peterson-Badali, Ruck, & Ridley, 2003). However, both children and adults (Peterson-Badali et al., 2003; Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Day, 2002) show significantly less, as well as greater variability in, support for self-determination rights (although not all studies of youth show greater support for nurturance than self-determination rights; Ruck et al., 2002; Ruck, Tenenbaum, & Sines, 2007). Not surprisingly, support for children's rights also varies with the age of the child about whom participants are responding. Whereas endorsement of children's rights to nurturance typically remains high regardless of the age of the ‘target’ child (Morton & Dubanoski, 1980; Peterson-Badali et al., 2003; Ruck, Tenenbaum & Willenberg, 2011), support for self-determination rights for adolescents is significantly stronger than for younger children (Ruck et al., 1998). Indeed, support for younger children’s (e.g., 12-year
olds’) rights to self-determination over a range of issues tends to be quite poor, particularly among adults (Peterson-Badali et al., 2003; Rogers & Wrightsman, 1978) and older adolescents (e.g., Day, Peterson-Badali, & Ruck, 2006).

Moving from endorsement to an examination of respondents’ reasoning about their views provides an important context for understanding variation in support for the two types of rights. Consistent with earlier discussion of the importance of situational factors in children’s thinking and decision making about rights and civil liberties, the type of right—nurturance or self-determination—emerges as a relevant contextual factor in children’s reasoning about children’s rights. Studies have shown that children’s justifications for asserting or withholding nurturance rights often consider social or familial roles and well-being, and rarely refer explicitly to the rights of the various parties involved (e.g., children, parents; Ruck et al., 1998, 2002). In contrast, judgments about self-determination rights are more likely to include an explicit focus on individual rights and rights-related concepts such as personal freedom and autonomy (Ruck et al., 1998, 2002). Such differentiation is consistent with the domain approach described above and stands in contrast to a global stage interpretation of children’s reasoning about their rights (Ruck et al., 1998).

Few studies have compared children’s and parents’ social reasoning about children’s nurturance and self-determination rights. This is surprising given that parents are often the “gatekeepers” to children’s rights (Cherney, Greteman, & Travers, 2008; Helwig, 1997; Ruck et al., 2002). Since children are typically economically, psychologically, and physically dependent on their parents, children’s rights are often accessed by parents on the child’s behalf rather than via the child’s own agency (Cherney et al., 2008; Peterson-Badali, Morine, Ruck, & Slonim, 2004). In North American research, comparisons of children’s and parents’ (usually mothers’) views regarding children’s rights indicate that children generally show significantly greater support for self-determination rights than their mothers, with the reverse holding true for nurturance rights (e.g., Day et al., 2006; Peterson-Badali et al., 2004; Ruck et al., 2002). There also appears to be somewhat of a rapprochement during later adolescence, when parents and young people show similar levels of support for adolescents’ nurturance and autonomy rights (Ruck et al., 2002).

When the reasoning behind endorsements is explored, the distinction between role- and relationship-based justifications for nurturance rights and more explicit autonomy and rights-based rationales for self-determination rights emerges for mothers as well as children. However, in addition, compared to adolescents, mothers’ reasoning is more likely to reflect sensitivity to the age or maturity of the target child, particularly in the context of self-determination rights (Ruck et al., 2002). The finding that, for mothers, maturity issues are more salient for self-determination situations is consistent with the types of concerns adults often consider when determining whether children should be able to exercise various self-determination rights and civil liberties (Helwig, 1997). In some cases mothers also explicitly recognize the tension between children’s right to self-determination and their entitlement to care and protection in their reasoning (Ruck et al., 2002). For some mothers, children’s entitlement to care supersedes their need for self-determination and is explained by mothers in terms of their right to intervene in their child’s life for the child’s benefit.

As described above, there is now an extensive body of research on children’s and adolescents’ conceptions of their own nurturance and self-determination rights. Much of the research designed to assess young people’s reasoning about their own rights has employed
stimuli (e.g., hypothetical situations) where it is assumed that the child respondent will identify with the story character; hence characters are age- or sex-matched to the respondent (e.g., Ruck, et al., 1998; for a methodological review, see Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008). In contrast, in other studies examining children’s reasoning about rights, the age of the story character is kept constant so that participants are all evaluating the rights of children of the same age (e.g., Day et al., 2006; Helwig, 1997; Peterson-Badali et al., 2003). In both types of studies, there is an implicit assumption that, regardless of age, participants are characterizing the target child as a member of their own group (i.e., in-group). Yet what these studies fail to tell us is how children may think about the rights of individuals who are members of other groups (i.e., out-groups). Recently, however, studies have begun to explicitly investigate how young people think about the rights of children who are members of out-groups, such as asylum seekers or refugees (Ruck, Tenenbaum, & Sines, 2007; Tenenbaum & Ruck et al., 2007).

For example, in the United Kingdom, as well as many other European countries, concerns about immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees have become a major focus in political and public debates concerning tolerance and the rights of ethnic minority groups (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Muss, 1997). In addition, recent surveys in the United Kingdom conducted with adult samples suggest that refugees or asylum seekers are often viewed negatively and perceived as a threat to British culture (MORI, 2003; YouGov/Mail on Sunday, 2004). However, less is known about how British children and adolescents think about the nurturance and self-determination rights of asylum-seeker and refugee youth who are often perceived as “different” by the majority or in-group.

Employing hypothetical vignettes where an asylum-seeker child’s nurturance and self-determination rights conflicted with the societal practices of the majority group, two recent studies examined British youth’s understanding concerning secular nurturance and self-determination rights of asylum seekers. Ruck et al. (2007) found that British early to middle adolescents were more likely to endorse same-age asylum-seeking children’s nurturance rights than self-determination rights. In addition, reasoning about both types of rights was multifaceted and focused on moral, social–conventional, and psychological issues. British children were more likely to make appeals to moral-based reasoning (e.g., notions of fairness and empathy) when providing justifications for asylum-seeker children’s nurturance rights. In contrast, when participants reasoned about asylum-seeker children’s self-determination rights (which they were less likely to endorse), they were more likely to employ social–conventional (e.g., the importance of maintaining group functioning or adherence to authority) and psychological (e.g., focus on personal choice) reasoning.

In the United Kingdom, many asylum seekers engage in cultural and religious practices often unfamiliar to members of mainstream British society (Lynch & Cunningham, 2000). Yet, relatively little is known about how British youth view the religious rights of asylum seekers or refugees. To address this gap, Tenenbaum & Ruck (2012) examined British young people’s understanding of the religious and nonreligious nurturance and self-determination rights of asylum-seeker youth in a sample of 11- to 24-year olds. They found that participants showed the highest levels of support for asylum-seeking youth’s nonreligious nurturance rights (e.g., the right to parental emotional support) and religious self-determination rights (e.g., right to practice one’s own religion) followed by less support for religious nurturance rights (e.g., the right to food prepared according to specific
religious beliefs). British youth showed the lowest level of support for asylum seekers’ nonreligious or secular self-determination rights (e.g., the right to choose where to live). In terms of specific age differences, the youngest participants (11–12 and 13–14 years of age) were more willing to endorse asylum seekers’ nonreligious self-determination rights than the oldest participants (17–18 and 19–24 years of age). According to the authors, these findings suggest that with increasing age British youth may become less tolerant of same-age asylum seekers’ nonreligious or secular self-determination rights.

The patterns of reasoning participants exhibited varied based on the type of right and whether the scenario implicated religious or nonreligious rights. Appeals to practical considerations were more likely to be made when discussing whether asylum seekers’ religious nurturance rights should be supported. For example, for one of the scenarios that dealt with the preparation of food according to the asylum seeker’s religious belief, participants were more likely to focus on the difficulty in trying to fulfill various religious dietary restrictions for so many different asylum seekers. When considering religious self-determination rights, British youth were aware of the importance of respecting the asylum seekers’ beliefs and customs. However, for nonreligious or secular self-determination rights (which participants were less likely to endorse), these same youth were more likely to suggest that asylum seekers should “just be grateful for being allowed in the country.” As Tenenbaum and Ruck (2012) noted, “[I]t may be for the British youth we interviewed endorsing secular self-determination rights might be interpreted as giving asylum-seekers privileges or rights not warranted given their non-citizenship status or providing them with advantages not accorded to others, whereas no obvious benefit [for the asylum seeker compared to a British citizen] would result for supporting religious self-determination rights” (p. 1112).

In general, the findings from these two studies are consistent with recent work focusing on Dutch youth’s attitudes toward the political rights and civil liberties of Muslims (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2007), which found that older adolescents (15- to 18-year olds) were less supportive than their younger counterparts (12- to 14-year olds) of Muslims’ political rights than similar rights for non-Muslims. In addition, the work of Ruck and colleagues (Ruck et al., 2007; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2012) provides evidence of the multifaceted nature of majority group youth’s intergroup social reasoning about the rights of ethnic minority youth such as asylum seekers. The findings from such research have important implications for understanding the development of attitudes about the fair treatment of others, equality, and human rights.

The research described up to this point has focused on children’s understanding of agency as self-determination, largely considered in terms of noninterference in people’s lives or freedom or personal choice. In the next section, we shift the focus to children’s understandings of people’s right to participate in various forms of social decision making, long seen as a core feature of democratic social organization. This broad democratic idea is at the nexus where human agency and choice meet moral obligations regarding the justice and structure of social institutions (e.g., families, schools, and government).

**Democracy and Democratic Decision Making**

Democracy comprises forms of social organization in which individuals are given a say in decisions that affect them (Cohen, 1971). Democracy, in its varied forms, is frequently
justified as serving general or universal moral aims of justice and respect for persons (Cohen, 1971; Richardson, 2002). Democratic procedures of social decision making that allow individuals from various segments of society to express their viewpoints (either directly or through their elected representatives), and to have an impact on social policies or decisions, have been argued to help protect individuals from the arbitrary exercise of political power and to provide a means for correcting existing injustices in policies or practices.

One avenue of research has examined children's developing understandings of democratic decision-making processes (e.g., majority rule) in a variety of social contexts familiar to children, such as the peer group, school, or family (Helwig & Kim, 1999; Kinoshita, 2006). This research has found that children from 6 years of age and older endorse majority rule as a fair procedure for making decisions in social groups (e.g., Kinoshita, 1989; Moessinger, 1981). Although younger children are more likely to endorse majority rule as the fairest way of making decisions when people have conflicting preferences, adolescents are more aware of how certain features of group structure can determine the fairness of majority rule. For example, adolescents see majority rule as fair only if the group is composed of shifting majorities, in which people are on different sides of different decisions over time; otherwise the group may become dominated by an entrenched majority.

Children's applications of majority rule are also influenced by the appropriateness of the particular decision being considered. For example, democratic decision-making procedures that give children full input into decisions, such as majority rule or consensus, are seen as appropriate for decisions about matters such as recreational pursuits or for coordinating decisions involving conflicting personal preferences, such as what game to play (Helwig & Kim, 1999). In that study, Canadian children between the ages of 6 and 13 believed that it would be wrong for adults to unilaterally make these kinds of decisions for children, and they appealed to democratic principles such as majority rule or children's need to have a voice in decisions that mattered to them. In some instances, they even extended these democratic notions into social contexts where adults have traditionally had decision-making authority, such as school classrooms. When a class decision was perceived as largely recreational in nature or as involving children's own personal interest, such as a school class deciding where to go on a field trip, children believed that the decision should be made democratically, by the vote of the class, and they criticized unilateral adult decision making as unfair. At the same time, when the decision was seen as having implications for children's welfare or when adults were perceived as more competent to make better decisions (e.g., concerning school curriculum), children ceded legitimate decision-making authority to adults. Thus, children are sensitive to issues of children's competence or maturity as well as the goals instantiated in different social organizational contexts (e.g., recreation versus education) in deciding the particular issues over which children should be given democratic decision-making autonomy.

Children's reasoning about the suitability of different democratic procedures (i.e., majority rule versus consensus) also showed subtle discriminations by social context (Helwig & Kim, 1999). One issue children considered when reasoning about which decision-making procedure was appropriate was the likelihood of reaching agreement in different social contexts. For example, consensus was seen as more appropriate for decisions made
in small groups, such as the family or the peer group, where differences of opinion were fewer and could be resolved through discussion. However, in larger groups such as the classroom, where divergence of opinion might be greater and compromise more difficult to achieve, children preferred more formal democratic procedures such as voting or majority rule.

Children’s early understandings of democracy in more familiar or proximal social contexts are based on beliefs about the importance of having a say (“voice”) and majority rule. Other research with Canadian and U.S. children has extended investigation of these fundamental democratic notions into the more distal sphere of government (e.g., Helwig, 1998; Sinatra, Beck, & McKeown, 1992), where earlier research characterized children’s understandings as highly limited (Greenstein, 1965). Rather than asking children to provide definitions of democracy, as in the earlier research, these studies presented children with examples of different “classic” systems of government, including democratic and nondemocratic systems, and asked them to evaluate their fairness and explain their judgments. It was found that even elementary school-age children judge democratic governments, such as a direct democracy in which everyone votes on every important policy decision, or a representative democracy in which the people elect representatives to govern for them, as more fair than nondemocratic forms of government, such as an oligarchy of the wealthy or a meritocracy of the most knowledgeable (Helwig, 1998). In justifying these judgments, children appealed to basic democratic principles of voice or accountability (i.e., people should have a say and leaders have to be accountable to the wishes of the people) in justifying why the democratic systems are fairer.

However, children’s political understandings also display several limitations. Children’s understanding of the political concept of representation is limited in elementary school, leading them to prefer direct democracy (simple majority rule) to representative government (Sinatra et al., 1992). Also, children do not fully appreciate some of the problems associated with direct democracy as a form of government, including whether majority rule can adequately protect minority rights and whether it is the best approach to deciding complex questions of public policy (Helwig, 1998). In contrast, by mid-adolescence, representative democracy is preferred because it is seen as fulfilling both the democratic functions of voice and representation along with the pragmatic function of delegating decision making to those who have the time to devote to formulating and debating public policy (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2007).

Another limitation of young children’s moral and political reasoning pertains to their understanding of political agency. In Helwig’s (1998) study, elementary school-age children were presented with a dilemma in which a democratically elected government passes a law restricting the freedom of speech rights of a minority to criticize the governments’ decisions. When asked what could be done about it, 6-year olds tended simply to state that “you’d have to live with it,” consistent with their view of people as essentially political subjects (Gallatin, 1985). In contrast, 11-year olds spontaneously mentioned a host of actions that those opposed to the law could take, including political protests, boycotts, and petitions to the government. Older children conceived of democratic citizens more as political agents who could effectively challenge unjust governmental policies through political action.

The findings of the research on democratic decision making bear several similarities to those of the research on rights reviewed earlier. First, the research shows that even young
children possess understandings of basic features of democratic norms and procedures, including norms of fairness based on majority rule and the importance of voice, or allowing people to have a say in group decision-making processes. These democratic principles or norms were seen to apply not only to adults but also to children. Furthermore, there was no evidence that the development of democratic understandings follows a pattern of differentiation of truly democratic understandings from those based on punishment, authority, or social custom or convention (Kohlberg, 1981). Rather, even young children seem to understand the basic functions and rationales that underlie democratic norms and procedures. With development, applications of democratic concepts appear to become more sophisticated as children and adolescents consider different features of social contexts, including the competence of different agents to exercise democratic decision-making autonomy, the goals and functions of different types of social organizations, and the practical implications of implementing democratic decision making in groups of different sizes and compositions.

**Nonuniversalistic Perspectives: Cultural Psychology and Individualism–Collectivism**

The research on conceptions of rights and democracy described in the previous sections has come mostly from Western societies, or at least those with Western-style democratic political systems. The extent to which these findings may generalize to other cultures with different political and social organizations is an important question. This question is of prime significance for theorizing in moral development because of the current popularity of theoretical perspectives from cultural psychology (see Miller & Bland, this volume) that propose that cultures vary over their commitment to personal autonomy, rights, and other democratic values and beliefs. One way of framing these differences has been in terms of individualism versus collectivism (mentioned at the outset of this chapter; see also Triandis, 1989).

Distinctions about individualism and collectivism were originally framed in dichotomous (either or) terms (e.g., Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987); however, more recent versions of these positions have argued that although each of these opposing orientations may be available to individuals across cultures, the degree to which they are used or valued varies by culture. For example, Shweder et al. (2006) have proposed that there are three ethical systems available to people in all cultures: an ethics of *autonomy* that focuses on personal choice, rights, and equality; an ethics of *community* that emphasizes social duties, hierarchy, group goals, and traditions; and an ethics of *divinity*, which emphasizes one’s place in a religious or supernatural order. The ethics of autonomy is more frequently used in Western societies and especially by highly educated, liberal, secular groups within these societies (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). The ethics of community is prominent within East Asian societies and other collectivist societies emphasizing group conformity, and the ethics of divinity characterizes much of moral reasoning in societies in which religion permeates the social order (e.g., India). Developmentally, it has been proposed that these orientations become salient at different ages, with the ethics of autonomy understood and used by young children even in non-Western or collectivist cultures, but in those societies where social groups or religious duties are salient, autonomy becomes increasingly
subordinated to the ethics of community or divinity as children come to better understand the basis of these other moral codes with age (Jensen, 2008). The individualism–collectivism construct, and the notion that cultures can be characterized through the use of such general templates or cultural ideologies, have been extensively critiqued elsewhere (see, for example, Bond, 2002; Helwig, 2005; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Turiel, 2002; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994). Here, we will examine these propositions in light of the body of research examining judgments and reasoning about rights, autonomy, and democratic concepts in a variety of non-Western cultural settings.

A growing body of research from the social domain perspective indicates that children from a variety of other cultures (besides North America) also identify a personal domain that is viewed as beyond the bounds of authority regulation and justified by appeals to personal choice and autonomy. This form of reasoning has been found in cultures as diverse as Japan (Killen & Sueyoshi, 1995; Yamada, 2009), Brazil (Nucci, Camino, & Sapiro, 1996), Colombia (Ardila-Rey & Killen, 2001), Korea (Kim & Turiel, 1996), and China (Yau & Smetana, 2003a, 2003b). Some of these studies (e.g., Nucci et al., 1996; Yau & Smetana, 2003b) have traced the development of the personal domain across various age ranges, and as in the North American studies, the scope of the personal has been found to expand as children get older and claim increasing personal jurisdiction over a wider range of issues. However, in research conducted in a variety of environments (urban versus rural) within Brazil, children from rural or lower SES settings were found to endorse personal jurisdiction at later ages than children from urban or higher SES settings, although these differences disappeared by mid-adolescence (Nucci et al., 1996).

Furthermore, other studies with non-Western samples (e.g., Asian societies) have found that the expansion of the personal domain in adolescence often leads to increasing conflict with adults, as found in North America. For example, Yau and Smetana (2003b) examined adolescents’ reports of experiences of conflict and disagreement with their parents, and their reasoning about these events, in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, a city in Mainland China. It was found that in both cities, conflicts between adolescents and their parents were not infrequent—a finding that contrasts with collectivist characterizations of Chinese family life and culture as reflecting mainly social harmony and submission to parental authority. Although conflicts were less frequent in Shenzhen than in Hong Kong overall, conflicts over schoolwork were more frequent in Shenzhen. Similarities were found between the results of this study and those of previous research with Western samples (Smetana, 1989) in the kinds of issues that lead to conflict (e.g., chores, regulation of activities, interpersonal relationships) and, most significantly, in the kinds of justifications used by adolescents to support their position in disputes. To challenge parental authority and control, adolescents in both cities appealed to concepts such as personal choice and the pursuit of individual needs and desires. Appeals to personal choice increased with age in both Hong Kong and Shenzhen, consistent with the developmental progression toward greater concern with autonomy issues in adolescence identified by Western researchers and theorists (Dornbusch et al., 1985; Erikson, 1968; Helwig, 2006).

An emerging body of research in a variety of non-Western cultural groups has examined reasoning about more abstract self-determination rights, including civil liberties such as freedom of speech and religion. Although these rights are sometimes considered to be “Western” notions and thus incompatible with other cultural traditions emphasizing
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duty, tradition, and submission to authority or the group (see Bauer & Bell, 1999; Jung, 1994; Zakaria, 1994), adolescents from various non-Western societies have been found to endorse these and other self-determination rights and to view them as universal human rights. These include adolescents from traditional Arab populations residing in both Israel (Ben Arieh & Koury-Kassabri, 2008; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998) and the Netherlands (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2008), Chinese adolescents living in Malaysia (Cherney & Shing, 2008), children from South Africa (Ruck, et al., 2011), and even those from urban and rural Mainland China (Lahat et al., 2009). For example, Lahat et al. (2009) examined urban and rural Chinese adolescents’ reasoning about the self-determination and nurturance rights of adolescents, presented in scenarios that entailed a conflict with authorities such as school officials or parents. For self-determination, these conflicts included freedom of speech (e.g., whether it would be acceptable for a school principal to prohibit a high school student from publishing an article critical of the school in the school newspaper), freedom of religion (e.g., whether a child’s parents, who are atheists, could prohibit a child from belonging to a religion of the child’s choice), and privacy (whether or not a parent could read a child’s diary). Similar to findings in North American contexts, urban and rural Chinese adolescents were found to increasingly support self-determination rights with age (although urban adolescents endorsed these rights somewhat more strongly than rural adolescents). In supporting adolescents’ freedom to make choices, Chinese adolescents explicitly appealed to individual rights, autonomy, and personal choice. In contrast, nurturance rights, such as access to education, the emotional support of parents, or medical care, were endorsed at all ages. The support for children’s rights, especially self-determination rights, found in this study is striking and occurred despite the general lack of support for civil liberties in Mainland China’s political system when compared with the West (Peerenboom, 2002).

In a recent study of 9- to 13-year-old mixed-race South African children and their mothers that employed similar measures to the Lahat et al. (2009) study, Ruck et al. (2011) found that self-determination rights were endorsed to some extent by participants, and justifications for their choices included references to autonomy and maturity. However, in contrast both to the bulk of North American research and to the study of Chinese youth described above, there was greater support for nurturance rights than self-determination rights at all ages and no increase with age in children’s endorsement of self-determination (such as the right to privacy, freedom of expression and political participation, and the right to work). In addition, unlike North American studies, there were no significant differences between children and mothers in terms of support for nurturance and self-determination rights. In interpreting the findings, the authors suggest that the salience of nurturance rights for both mothers and children may be viewed in light of the fact that South Africa has one of the highest murder and violent assault rates in the world (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2004) and noted that the findings are also consistent with a recent qualitative investigation (Willenberg & Savahl, 2004) in which South African children viewed well-being in terms of protection from threats to their personal safety.

Other recent research conducted in China has explored Chinese adolescents’ understandings of democratic principles, such as majority rule (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003; Helwig et al., 2011). Chinese adolescents also endorse majority rule as a fair procedure for making decisions in social groups, with the same kinds of variations across
social contexts and conditions documented in the research with Western adolescents (e.g., Helwig & Kim, 1999). Interestingly, some findings appear to go against broad cultural orientations such as individualism–collectivism. For example, Chinese adolescents were found to show stronger support for students’ democratic decision making over issues of school curriculum and greater criticism of control over the curriculum by educational authorities than did Canadian children in the prior research. In doing so, Chinese adolescents objected to the top–down, uniform curriculum in China geared toward standardized tests and university entrance examinations, and they desired more student input into the curriculum as a way of fostering creativity and motivation. As one Chinese adolescent in that study remarked (Helwig et al., 2003, p. 796), when the curriculum is decided by educational authorities “many things, such as natural inclination, creativity, and freedom, are strangled because of this.”

Other research shows that Chinese adolescents recognized how democratic principles of majority rule can be constrained by personal freedoms and individual rights. One study (Helwig et al., 2011) explored urban and rural Chinese adolescents’ understandings of the types of issues over which groups such as a school class could make decisions by majority rule and when these decisions would be seen as binding on individuals. For adolescents from both settings, majority rule was judged acceptable and binding for deciding social–conventional group activities (such as how to organize a class party or what to paint on a class mural), but it was not seen as acceptable or binding for deciding personal issues such as what a class would eat for lunch, or with whom members of the class could be friends. Helwig et al. (2011) also examined Chinese adolescents’ reasoning about individual political or democratic rights, such as students’ voting rights presented in the context of a scenario involving a hypothetical school election.

According to Hofstede (2001), a key difference between political systems in collectivist versus individualist societies is that in collectivist societies, opinions and votes are seen as predetermined by group memberships, whereas in individualistic societies, the principle “one person, one vote” applies, and voting is expected to reflect personal opinions. It was found that, consistent with Hofstede’s (2001) characterization, younger (13-year-old) rural Chinese children were more inclined to believe that it would be acceptable for a school class to decide by majority rule who the whole class would vote for in the election, and to compel all members of the class to vote for that candidate. In contrast, however, older (17-year-old) rural adolescents (and urban adolescents in general) were more likely to view voting as an individual decision that was beyond group jurisdiction.

Thus, despite the greater pressure to conform to the desires of salient groups evident within the traditional and collectivistic setting of the rural adolescents (and reflected in the responses of the rural 13-year olds), with increasing age, rural adolescents tended to define voting as an individual right and to prioritize personal choice over considerations of following group preferences or maintaining classroom solidarity. Furthermore, in other research (Helwig et al., 2007), Chinese adolescents from both rural and urban settings have been found to judge hypothetical democratic systems of government based on representation (elected leaders) and majority rule as more fair than various nondemocratic alternatives. In that cross-cultural study, both Chinese and Canadian adolescents similarly appealed to democratic principles of voice, representation, and accountability to justify why democratic governments were more just. These cross-cultural similarities in reasoning
and preferences for democratic systems of government were found despite the fact that Chinese citizens do not presently have the right to elect their leaders in national elections.

All of this recent research indicates that personal choice, autonomy, and democratic concepts are salient dimensions of the thinking of children and adults in a variety of non-Western societies. This is not, of course, to say that individual rights or democratic notions such as voice, personal freedom, or equality would always be given priority over other considerations. Indeed, the findings of these and other studies employing conflicts between rights and other issues have shown similar patterns as those found in studies in the West, with democratic rights and personal choice given priority in some situations but subordinated to concerns with welfare or upholding cultural traditions or customs in other situations (e.g., Lahat et al., 2009; Ruck et al., 2011; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998; Verkuyten & Slooter, 2008).

Taken together, all of this research suggests that considerations of personal choice, autonomy, and democratic notions of voice and participation are salient dimensions of the thinking of children and adults in a variety of non-Western or traditional societies. As such, the findings call into question global characterizations of non-Western societies in terms of duty-based moralities for whom personal choice and autonomy are considered of little importance.

In many instances, considerations of personal autonomy or individual rights are not increasingly subordinated to community norms or obedience to authority with socialization (Jensen, 2008), but remain important and are acted on by both children and adults in these societies. In fact, in diverse cultural settings, reasoning based on rights and autonomy often showed age-related increases throughout childhood and adolescence (e.g., Lahat et al., 2009, Nucci et al., 1995; Yau & Smetana, 2003b). At the same time, people coordinate notions of personal freedom and democratic principles of voice and participation with other issues—such as social–conventional norms or social–organizational goals implicated in different social contexts—in ways that often show contextual variations or even disagreement among those occupying different positions in social hierarchies (e.g., men versus women, parents versus children, students versus educational authorities). Individuals also show sensitivity to how different rights are being met or not in their social environments, leading them to prioritize self-determination or nurturance in different ways (e.g., Helwig et al., 2003; Ruck et al., 2011). Accounting for this complexity requires us to move beyond general, cultural-level explanations and to consider the diverse conceptual systems brought to bear by individuals as they attempt to make sense of, and evaluate, their social environments.

Do Rights and Democracy Matter? Relations With Well-Being and Adjustment in Various Social Contexts

In this section, we examine some recent research addressing the question of whether or not rights and democracy may also be adaptive and have functional significance for individuals’ psychological well-being.

Researchers from diverse theoretical perspectives have identified autonomy as an important psychological function necessary for the formation of a personal identity and self (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Nucci, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2011). Social domain theorists have suggested that children’s formulation of a personal domain is rooted in these necessary
and universal dimensions of human psychological functioning, believed to hold across different cultural environments (Nucci, 2001; see Nucci, this volume). Correspondingly, self-determination theorists (Ryan & Deci, 2011) have postulated that autonomy is one of three basic human psychological needs whose nourishment is necessary for optimal human functioning (the others are needs for relatedness and competence). Here, autonomy is conceptualized as acting on one’s will and fully endorsing one’s actions, rather than being compelled by external circumstances or other people. Notably, this definition of autonomy is different from independence from others, as the construct of autonomy is sometimes conceptualized—too much of which could be unhealthy as individuals also has relatedness needs (see Kagitcibasi, 2005, for a discussion of the differences between autonomy and independence). The perception that one’s behavior is lacking in choice or externally compelled (heteronomy) has been argued to be associated with a host of negative outcomes for psychological well-being, such as depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety, as documented in a large body of research (reviewed in Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Correspondingly, social environments, including institutions such as families, schools, and political systems themselves, may vary in the extent to which they provide opportunities for fulfillment of basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2011). Democratic social environments may be especially autonomy-supportive because they allow individuals greater choice and input into decisions and are explicitly designed to respect their autonomy and freedom within appropriate boundaries (Helwig & McNeil, 2011). Given, as we have seen, that individuals from diverse cultural environments develop conceptions of personal freedom and democratic principles based on autonomy-related ideas such as ‘voice’ and personal choice, an important question, then, is whether individuals who perceive their social environments (e.g., authorities, institutions) as illegitimately restricting their freedoms and democratic rights also would suffer detrimental consequences to their psychological well-being.

An emerging body of cross-cultural research from different theoretical perspectives has begun to address this question. Building on social domain theory, researchers have investigated the effects of perceived parental control in a variety of social domains on Japanese, U.S., and Chinese adolescents’ psychological well-being (Hasebe, Nucci, & Nucci, 2004; Helwig, Yang, Nucci, & To, 2009). Consistent with the findings reviewed earlier, adolescents from all of these countries did not accept parental control for issues that were seen as purely personal, or for some mixed or “overlapping” issues that involved conflicts between adolescents’ autonomy and other domains, such as social conventions. When adolescents perceived their parents as overcontrolling of these issues (i.e., as actually restricting their autonomy more than they thought was legitimate), they reported higher levels of internalizing symptoms, such as anxiety and depression (Hasebe et al., 2004; Helwig et al., 2009). However, they did not tend to report these symptoms for parental control in other domains (e.g., social–conventional issues or “prudential” issues involving behaviors having potential harm to the adolescents themselves), where parental control was seen as legitimate. Thus, the harmful effects of behavioral or psychological control (Barber, Stolz, & Olson, 2005) were not general but were specifically confined to those issues in which adolescents perceive and claim personal freedom (or self-determination).

Other research has focused on perceptions of democratic school or family climate, usually conceptualized in terms of children having a say or input into decision making. Way,
Reddy, and Rhodes (2007) conducted a large, longitudinal study of over 1,400 U.S. adolescents in sixth through eighth grades and found that perceptions of students’ autonomy in schools became more negative over the course of the 3-year period of middle school, and that those changes were associated with increases in depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and adjustment problems. Moreover, using path analyses, the researchers were able to show that the direction of effect was from changes in perceptions of autonomy to well-being (rather than changes in adjustment predicting changes in perceptions of democratic school climate). It is not known whether adolescents’ perceptions of declining autonomy were based on actual declines in the levels of opportunities for decision making that they were being given as they progressed through the grades, or whether adolescents’ developmental expansions in claims for decision-making autonomy (as documented in the social domain research reviewed earlier) were leading them to become more critical of the level of autonomy provided by their schools as they grew older. Nevertheless, these findings provide support for the idea that the provision of voice and opportunities for decision making in social institutions such as schools is an important avenue for the expression of children’s developing autonomy needs, and that the failure of institutions to provide developmentally appropriate avenues for the expression of these needs is negatively associated with psychological health and adjustment.

Recent research has replicated these associations in studies conducted in Mainland China (Jia et al., 2009; To, Helwig, & Yang, 2011). Jia et al. (2009) found that Mainland Chinese students from the city of Nanjing who perceived their schools as having a more democratic climate had higher self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and depression than those who perceived their schools as relatively lacking in student opportunities for involvement in decision making. To et al. (2011) found similar relations between perceptions of democratic climate (conceptualized as including not only opportunities for decision making but also school and authority support for students’ freedom of expression and due process rights) and a variety of well-being measures (anxiety, depression, and general life satisfaction), among Chinese adolescents from both urban and rural settings. These associations were even stronger for adolescents’ perceptions of their own families’ democratic climate, indicating that these relations between democratic climate and well-being extend beyond schools to include home environments. Furthermore, perceptions of both family and school democratic climate predicted significant additional variance in psychological well-being over and above that predicted by parental and teacher responsiveness, as well as that predicted by a more general measure of autonomy support (used in self-determination theory research) that included other features of autonomy not directly related to democracy (e.g., parental or teacher encouragement of adolescents’ exploration of their interests). Thus, specifically democratic features of autonomy (i.e., voice, freedom of expression, and due process) appear to be uniquely predictive of varied indicators of psychological well-being among adolescents from urban and rural Mainland China.

The recent research reviewed in this section suggests that rights and democratic concepts are related to psychological well-being and adjustment in a variety of cultures (Western and non-Western) and social environments (schools, families). Social contexts and institutions that are perceived by adolescents as supportive of individual rights and freedoms and that provide opportunities for democratic involvement in decision making are associated with higher levels of self-esteem, fewer psychological problems, and better
adjustment for adolescents. Of course, this research is preliminary in scope and needs to be extended to other cultural environments beyond East Asia and North America. Nevertheless, these intriguing results suggest that democracy and freedom are not only moral goods valued across cultures, but their instantiation in proximal social contexts relevant to children may also contribute positively to human flourishing.

Conclusion

The findings of the research described in this chapter suggest that conceptions of rights, civil liberties, and democracy begin to develop in early childhood and are found across a variety of cultures. These include societies in North America and Europe, Asian cultures (e.g., Mainland China, Malaysia), and Muslim groups residing in the Middle East. This body of research indicates that notions of personal autonomy and rights are not tied to “Western” intellectual or cultural traditions (Haidt, 2012), but have relevance to people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, notions of rights and democracy are not restricted to highly urban, modern environments but are found among traditional, rural populations as well. The emerging literature on relations between psychological well-being and personal freedoms and democracy illustrates the functional role these ideas may play in human psychological flourishing. Individuals desire and need to express their autonomy through defined areas of personal freedom and meaningful, democratic participation in social institutions; when these needs are perceived as not being met by social environments, people’s psychological health may suffer.

There are several directions in which this body of research needs to be extended. First, more cultural contexts need to be sampled to better identify the types of claims for personal autonomy and democratic participation that may be universal. Perhaps surprisingly, the research we have reviewed indicates that individuals from diverse cultural settings construct and affirm many of the basic freedoms identified in classic democratic theorizing, such as freedom of speech and religion, rights to privacy, and freedom of association, while at the same time sometimes subordinating these rights to other concerns or issues in situations of conflict. There appears to be remarkable congruence in the areas over which basic autonomy needs are extended and applied, even in the face of substantial cultural variation in social organizational forms. Based on theoretical propositions from self-determination theory and social domain theory, we would expect that individuals in any society would claim some areas of personal autonomy and jurisdiction free from undue restriction by authorities or social structures, although the particular areas identified as manifestations of autonomy may of course vary by culture (Nucci, 2001). Would individuals in simple hunter–gatherer or premodern societies also develop concepts of freedoms and apply them to some of these areas, or do these concepts require a certain degree of social–organizational complexity and attendant experiences for their construction? What about societies with strong authoritarian traditions (e.g., those ruled by a chieftain or patriarchy), or cultural groups that may share a fundamentalist perspective on religious truth and authority (e.g., the most conservative Islamic regions within Pakistan or Afghanistan)? What areas of personal jurisdiction or potential limits on secular or religious authority are identified by individuals in these sorts of societies? How are the rights of religious apostates or dissenters viewed? Would individuals from these societies...
still sometimes assert personal autonomy or prefer more democratic forms of decision making and participation (perhaps despite outward compliance to existing hierarchical social structures)?

A related question pertains to how broad and universal the functional model underlying human autonomy is, and whether or not it would hold beyond the types of societies investigated so far. If it were found that individuals in very simple (hunter–gatherer) or authoritarian or fundamentalist societies do not endorse personal freedoms and democratic participation, would people in these societies still suffer corresponding negative effects on their psychological well-being in the absence of such autonomy (or experience positive effects with enhanced personal freedom and participation)? It may be that the construction of conceptions of freedoms or democratic notions depends, in part, on certain types of positive experiences with more egalitarian forms of social organization, and thus a minimal level of familiarity with certain types of autonomy may be a prerequisite for the explicit construction of many democratic notions. Nevertheless, the positive functional benefits of autonomy may still be universal, and such experiences thus may help to drive the formulation of explicit conceptions of rights and democratic constructs when these opportunities are made available to those who previously have not had them. Studies of cultural transformation and change may prove important in addressing these questions. Understanding the role of varying social experiences and universal human needs for autonomy and participation in the formulation of different types of democratic conceptions remains an enduring issue in moral developmental theorizing and research (Piaget, 1932).

Note

1. The term Western is used in this chapter as referring to knowledge based on the culture, history, and philosophies of Euro–Western thought (Chilisa, 2012) and broadly refers to the following geographical areas: Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and parts of Central and South America. We acknowledge the values and assumptions of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization that are inherent in the use of this term (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tifflin, 2000; Young, 2001).

References


Part II

Socialization, Conscience, and the Family
Conscience consists of the cognitive, affective, social, motivational, and other influences by which individuals construct and act consistently with generalizable, internal standards of conduct. The development and functioning of conscience throughout life has been an enduring interest of philosophers and psychologists. In developmental psychology, conscience in early childhood has been a significant focus of theory and research because of the remarkable early conceptual, social, and temperamental contributions to its development. Research on early conscience also offers a new portrayal of early morality that is different from traditional conceptions of the premoral young child and, to some, provides a renewed foundation for a lifespan portrayal of moral development (Thompson, 2012).

This chapter summarizes theory and research on early conscience development and begins with a discussion of some of the theoretical and methodological foundations of work in this field. Next follows an overview of current research and its implications, along with a prospectus of future directions for this field. Key terms are italicized and defined in these sections. This chapter emphasizes current ideas and discoveries; for more extended discussions consult Thompson (2009), Thompson, Meyer, and McGinley (2006), and Kochanska and Thompson (1997).

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

Contemporary thinking about conscience development draws on two kinds of theoretical legacies. The first are traditional moral development theories that portray young children as self-centered and reliant on externalized (rather than internalized) controls, such as rewards and sanctions from authorities. In the psychoanalytic perspective, for example, morality derives from the child’s internalization of the parent’s values owing to the young child’s emotional dependency on and identification with the parent (Freud, 1935). Learning theorists likewise portray the young child as morally externalized and who responds to parental sanctions and follows parental example until better self-regulatory capacities develop (Bandura, 1991; Skinner, 1971). The third part of this traditional legacy, the cognitive–developmental theories of Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1969), argues that
because of early cognitive egocentrism, young children are consequentialist (rather than intentions-oriented) in moral judgment, authority- and obedience-oriented in understanding rules, absolutist in the application of these rules, and externalized and pragmatic in their motivation for socialized conduct.

The second kind of theoretical legacy influencing research on conscience is more recent and derives from a greater appreciation of the conceptual and emotional capabilities of young children. This includes the contributions of social domain theory, which highlights that young children use multifaceted conceptual criteria for distinguishing social rules and relationships in different domains of social interaction (e.g., Killen, 2007; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998), and research on the emotional and empathic origins of children’s prosocial motivation (Eisenberg, 2000). Taken together with the expanding research literature on children’s developing theory of mind (Harris, 2006), this second theoretical legacy underscores, contrary to the first, that young children are cognitively insightful and emotionally perceptive in ways that influence developing moral sensibility.

Together, this theoretical background has bequeathed to contemporary students of early conscience an appreciation for the affective and relational (psychoanalytic theory; prosocial research), socialized (learning theory), and cognitive foundations (social domain theory; theory of mind) of early moral development, which are integrated in the study of early conscience. Conscience development research also updates and extends these approaches to yield a portrayal of the young child as a moralist that is very different from earlier theory. In part owing to new understanding of early conceptual development, for example, contemporary developmentalists do not regard young children as egocentric but rather as socially sensitive to others’ feelings and perspectives and surprisingly insightful about the obligations of social relationships. In part owing to the influence of attachment theory, parental influences are now understood not primarily in terms of authority and sanctions but also in terms of mutual responsiveness, security, and shared discourse and understanding. Temperament theory and contemporary emotions theory have led to a new appreciation of the affective foundations of early moral growth that emphasizes empathy, emotion understanding, and self-regulation over anxiety. Current research in neuroscience adds to understanding of these affective foundations (e.g., Damasio’s [1994] concept of “somatic markers” by which somatically encoded memories of past emotional events guide future conduct).

Taken together, these theoretical advances have led to a conception of early childhood conscience as founded in close relationships, constructed from growth in young children’s psychological understanding of others, and based on constructive affective processes. This view has also deemphasized the discontinuities between early childhood morality and later morality that were also emphasized by traditional theories, whether conceived in terms of preconventional versus conventional morality, heteronomous versus autonomous moral orientation, externalized versus internalized morality, or pre-Oedipal versus post-Oedipal introjections. Instead, research on conscience development underscores that the foundations for later moral understanding can be found in the experiences and conceptual achievements of early childhood.

One reflection of this orientation to the study of early conscience is the thinking of Grazyna Kochanska, a leading researcher in this field. According to Kochanska (1993,
early conscience development is founded in the growth of a mutually responsive orientation between parent and child that sensitizes the child to the reciprocal obligations of close relationships. In this context, a young child is motivated by the parent’s affectionate, responsive care to respond constructively to parental initiatives, adopt parental values, and value and seek to maintain a positive parent–child relationship. In this warm relational context, conscience continues to grow as young children increasingly perceive themselves as people who try to do the right thing, feeling badly when they misbehave, and attempting to make amends—in other words, develop a “moral self.” Children’s temperamental qualities, including fearfulness and effortful control, are also important because they moderate the influence of specific parental practices. As the result of these and other early influences, two basic dimensions of conscience emerge in early childhood: one concerning moral emotion (especially guilt and empathy), and a second concerning rule-compatible conduct (including compliance with adult requests) (Aksan & Kochanska, 2005; Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). With increasing age, these two dimensions become increasingly coherent and integrated.

Kochanska’s views reflect (and have helped to create) several defining features of contemporary conscience research, including the integration of social, emotional, and cognitive processes, the bidirectional influences of parents and children, the significance of temperamental individuality, and the constructive influences of the child’s social, emotional, and conceptual capacities that, taken together, portray the early childhood moralist as having much in common with later ages. These features of research on early conscience will become more apparent in the sections that follow.

Before turning to current research, a comment about methodology is necessary. Research on early conscience has benefitted from the development of carefully designed measures to assess multiple dimensions of young children’s emerging understanding and compliance with values and standards of conduct. These include laboratory procedures involving observations of children’s cooperation with parental cleanup incentives, compliance (outside of supervision) with parental requests to resist playing with forbidden toys, reactions to contrived mishaps, and responses to difficult games and tasks when there is an opportunity to succeed by cheating. Other procedures involve carefully structured interviews to assess early self-understanding with respect to moral concerns (“moral self”), incomplete story vignettes involving moral themes requiring children’s story completion responses, and parental questionnaires assessing multiple features of children’s moral conduct and emotion. These measures are described further in the discussion that follows. In general, these diverse assessments of early conscience show reasonable levels of convergent validity and consistency over time, sometimes resulting in their aggregation in analyses (see Kochanska & Aksan, 2006, for a review). It is important to recognize, however, that because “conscience” is a multidimensional construct, research on conscience must be interpreted in light of how it is measured in each investigation, whether as cooperation, resistance to temptation, guilty feelings, “moral self,” a semiprojective story completion response, moral cognition, other behavior, or some combination of these. Although each operationalization relates to conscience, each reflects different (albeit overlapping) aspects of early conscience.
Contemporary Research on Early Conscience

Early Conceptual Foundations

Infants and young children are cognitively less sophisticated than they will be at later ages, but they also exhibit early social—cognitive capacities that are relevant to emergent moral appraisals and motivation. Many of these social—cognitive skills are built on their growing awareness of others’ goals and intentions, and their developing capacity to understand and participate in others’ goal-oriented activity, which is described as shared intentionality (Tomasello & Carpenter, 2007). A developing capacity for shared intentionality can be observed in toddlers’ collaborative problem-solving and helping behavior (e.g., Warneken & Tomasello, 2006), and it may also influence young children’s appraisals of the behavior of others.

Some of these earliest appraisals concern very young children’s evaluation of others’ fairness. Although some have claimed, based on looking time and touching, that babies as young as 3 months prefer shapes that behave “prosocially” rather than “antisocially” toward other shapes (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007, 2010), research with older children shows more clearly a tendency to interpret others’ actions as helpful or harmful, and to respond accordingly. Vaish, Carpenter, and Tomasello (2009) reported that 18- to 25-month olds were significantly more likely to offer assistance to an adult whom they had previously witnessed being harmed by another person, compared to an adult who had not been harmed. Hamlin, Wynn, Bloom, & Mahajan (2011) found that 19- to 23-month olds were more likely to provide rewards to a puppet previously observed as helpful and to take rewards from a puppet who had previously acted harmfully. These findings suggest that by the middle of the second year (if not earlier), young children are sensitive to the facilitating or hindering consequences of a person’s observed actions for another’s goals, which probably derives from their early sensitivity to the intentionality and goals underlying their behavior and that of others (Thompson, 2012; Thompson & Newton, 2013). Equally important, they seem to respond to these circumstances in ways implicitly reflecting fairness or equity concerns.

By the age of 3, equity judgments are even more apparent. Young children of this age have been found to distribute shared rewards according to the extent of each recipient’s contribution (Baumard, Mascaro, & Chevallier, 2012), and to use reciprocity and indirect reciprocity (i.e., rewarding those who previously gave to others) when allocating resources (Olson & Spelke, 2008). Even so, children of this age prefer to distribute resources equally rather than equitably when provided the opportunity to do so (see also Kenward & Dahl, 2011). By age 3, intentionality also figures into children’s judgments of others’ actions. In another study by Vaish, Carpenter, and Tomasello (2010), children had to choose to offer assistance either to an adult who had been previously observed acting harmfully toward another or to a neutral adult. Three-year olds were significantly less likely to offer assistance to the harmful adult, even when the adult only intended, but failed, to harm the other person. In another study, 3- and 4-year olds enlisted a story character’s intentions when judging her naughtiness when violating her mother’s prohibition (Nunez & Harris, 1998).

Taken together, these studies suggest several ways that advances in theory of mind, the ability to attribute and understand mental states in oneself and others, are important to early
Conscience Development in Early Childhood

Conscience development. These advances—beginning with implicit inferences of goals and intentions, early emotion understanding, and later comprehension of the associations of desires, goals, and emotions, as well as their causes—equip young children with capacities for morally relevant appraisals in their observations of others. More specifically, they enable toddlers and preschoolers to evaluate the consequences of someone’s actions for another’s goals, interpret the emotional consequences of these actions, assess whether that person acts (or intends to act) helpfully or not, and respond in an appropriate manner, such as by helping one who had previously been harmed, or rewarding one who is helpful. In light of evidence that as early as 18 months, toddlers are motivated to act helpfully toward an unfamiliar adult (e.g., Warneken & Tomasello, 2006), behavior motivated partly by the growth of shared intentionality, young children appear to appraise the actions of other people using a similar motivational orientation of equity or fairness. These early implicit judgments based on fairness or equity may be the foundation for more explicit fairness judgments observed at older ages, such as in circumstances of social exclusion (Killen, 2007).

These conceptual achievements become enlisted into moral appraisals because, in part, of how they ally with how caregivers convey moral values in their socialization practices. According to Smetana (1989), mothers justify their enforcement of moral rules to their 2- to 3-year olds on the basis of people’s needs or welfare, consistent with young children’s emerging appraisals of others’ actions, but mothers justify social conventional rules instead in terms of social order and regulation. Consequently, by 3–4 years of age, young children view moral violations as more serious and less revocable than violations of other domain rules, justifying their judgments in terms of unfairness and the harm to others entailed in moral violations (Nucci & Weber, 1995; Smetana, 1989).

Another illustration of how these appraisals become enlisted into developing morally relevant judgments concerns young children’s sensitivity to standards. Kagan (2005) has argued that toward the end of the second year, toddlers respond negatively and with concern when encountering objects that have been marred, damaged, or disfigured. He interprets this as an emerging moral sense because these damaged objects violate implicit norms of wholeness and intactness, norms that parents typically enforce through sanctions on breaking or damaging objects. In a study to test this view, my students and I presented children with objects that were systematically different from normal in various ways, including (a) being broken or damaged, (b) being functionally impaired without being broken (e.g., a cup with a finished hole at the bottom, so it could not hold liquid), or (c) being functionally intact but looking abnormal (e.g., a cup with the handle at an unusual angle) (Thompson, 2009). We found that toddlers responded with comparable interest and affect to all classes of abnormality, not only broken or damaged objects. Indeed, young children’s attention to atypicality is evident at the end of the second year in many domains, including nominal references in language usage, insisting on consistency in daily routines, and even sensitivity to variations in their appearance (see Thompson, 2009). Thus it appears that as it is applied to atypical objects with moral significance (e.g., those that are marred or torn), this sensitivity to atypicality in conventionality contributes to developing moral sensibility as young children become aware that broken or damaged objects are also disapproved and are to be avoided.

Young children thus begin moral development with a variety of conceptual capacities that become enlisted into their morally relevant appraisals. Theoretically, this is important
for understanding conscience development because it underscores that values acquisition is not simply young children’s internalization of rules and standards acquired from others, but their appropriation of normative expectations based on socialization influences that interact with the child’s early emerging and rapidly-developing social-cognitive and moral capacities. An important implication of this research is that early moral sensibility is built on young children’s sensitivity to the goals, intentions, desires, needs, feelings, and welfare of other people more than on global rules of conduct. This is supported by research on the spontaneous verbal utterances of young children in everyday situations that involve matters of right and wrong, when young children can be observed evaluating the goodness or badness of people’s dispositions and actions primarily by appealing to others’ feelings and welfare (Wright & Bartsch, 2008). In this respect, moral sensibility is governed by humanistic concerns from the beginning.

**Conscience and the Development of Self**

As research on moral identity and moral character at later ages indicates, moral development is also founded in the importance of moral values to self-understanding (Thompson, 2012). This is true even in early childhood. In recent years, researchers have discovered that when preschoolers are interviewed using carefully designed procedures, they can identify not only their external characteristics and abilities but also their internal characteristics, such as feelings, personality qualities, and traits (e.g., Marsh, Ellis, & Craven, 2002; Measelle, Ablow, Cowan, & Cowan, 1998). Five-year olds can reliably describe themselves in terms of their dominant affect, tendency toward anxiety or depression, social acceptance, feelings about themselves, and academic competencies, and these self-descriptions are validated by their external correlates in parental and teacher perceptions of the child. There is some evidence that similar procedures can be used with children as young as 3.5 years (Eder, 1990).

Kochanska (2002b) adapted this strategy to examine individual differences in a developing “moral self” that emerges by age 5. Preschoolers with a strong moral component to their self-awareness are more likely to endorse statements describing themselves as someone who feels badly about doing the wrong thing, apologizes for wrongdoing, tried to make amends, and related behavior. In her research, Kochanska has found that individual differences in the moral self are predicted by earlier differences in children’s compliance to parents’ requests and responses to contrived mishaps in the lab. Measures of the moral self at age 5 to 5.5 years mediated between these early measures of conscience development and later assessments of moral conduct and behavioral competence a year later (Kochanska, 2002b; Kochanska, Gross, Lin, & Nichols, 2002; Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim, & Yoon, 2010). Much more research is warranted into developmental processes influencing the growth of the moral self and its relevance to later aspects of moral development and self-understanding.

Another influence on self-awareness related to conscience development is *self-referential emotions* such as pride, guilt, shame, and embarrassment, which begin to emerge during the second half of the first year and have evaluations of the self as their elicitor (Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007). Although these emotions can be evoked in a variety of contexts, such as those associated with performance and achievement, situations involving...
moral wrongdoing are potent elicitors of guilt or shame, while moral compliance can readily evoke pride in young children. This is especially true because parental responses to young children’s cooperation or disobedience significantly influence early manifestations of these self-referential emotions (Stipek, 1995). Assessing self-referential emotions in young children is empirically challenging, but researchers have succeeded in reliably distinguishing a constellation of guilt-like behaviors (e.g., spontaneous confession, efforts at reparation), shame-like behaviors (e.g., avoidance of the adult, anxious mannerisms), and embarrassment (e.g., gaze-aversion and self-touching), with predictable associations emerging between guilt- and shame-like responses and morally relevant behavior. Kochanska and colleagues (2002), for example, observed young children’s emotional and behavioral responses reflecting guilt at 22, 33, and 45 months to experimental situations involving rigged mishaps in which children believed that they had damaged the experimenter’s special toy. Individual differences in these behaviors were stable over time and were modestly predictive of a battery of assessments at conscience at 56 months that included compliance with rules, moral themes in story completion responses, and the moral self (see also Barrett, 2005).

Mobilizing self-referential emotions for purposes of moral socialization is one way that cultural practices differ in the construction of the moral self in young children. Chinese mothers, for example, explicitly use shame as a sanction for disapproved conduct, and their children perceive anticipated shame as a significant disincentive for misbehavior (Fung, 2006).

**Temperament and Emotion**

Temperament is one of the many contributions of young children to their own conscience development. It is important both as a direct influence on conscience and as a moderator of other influences, such as parental discipline practices. There are at least three temperament dimensions that have received greatest attention in the research on early conscience.

The first is effortful (or inhibitory) control, which is associated with the self-regulatory aspects of conscience. This temperament dimension is significant in early childhood because young children have considerable difficulty complying in situations requiring inhibition, self-control, or behaving contrary to impulse or preference. One reason is that regions of the prefrontal cortex that govern self-regulation are neurobiologically immature early in life, making it difficult for young children to control their attention, emotions, and impulses (Johnson, 2010). Another related reason is that young children have limited executive functions, which are cognitive capacities that regulate and manage other abilities (Diamond, 2006). The core components of executive functions consist of inhibition (resisting making one prepotent response and instead making a secondary response), working memory (short-term memory, which enables, among other things, keeping behavioral expectations in mind while acting), and cognitive flexibility (which is the capacity to fluidly switch perspective or conceptual orientation). Each component of executive function is important to the self-regulation required in moral behavior. Conscience development derives in part, therefore, from the neurobiological and cognitive maturation required to enable children to manage their behavior, feelings, and impulses.
As these capacities develop, however, young children also vary temperamentally in their abilities to intentionally manage their behavior. **Effortful control** refers to the capacity for active, voluntary control of behavior, especially to suppress dominant responses in favor of subdominant responses (Rothbart, 2011). Individual differences in effortful control are apparent in the second year, and are associated with multiple measures of conscience contemporaneously and in the years that follow (Kochanska, Murray, & Coy, 1997). This temperament dimension thus has a direct association with conscience by facilitating self-regulation.

A second temperament dimension relevant to conscience is fear. Kochanska has shown that children who are temperamentally fearful are most influenced by maternal control strategies that de-emphasize power and instead entail nonassertive guidance and “gentle discipline,” which enlist but do not exacerbate the child’s natural anxiety about misbehaving. By contrast, for temperamentally fearless children, who are more bold than anxious, conscience develops primarily not through discipline practices but instead through the influence of a warm, responsive parent–child relationship (see Kochanska, 1995, 1997a; Kochanska, Aksan, & Joy, 2007). In this interaction between temperament and parenting, temperamental fear functions as a moderator of parenting practices that influence conscience development.

Finally, negative reactivity is a third temperament dimension relevant to conscience. It is influential as it interacts with parenting practices. Children’s uncooperative behavior during laboratory tasks at 30 months was predicted, for example, by the interaction of temperamental negative reactivity with the child’s self-regulatory capabilities (Stifter, Spinrad, & Braungart-Rieker, 1999) and maternal control strategies (Braungart-Rieker, Garwood, & Stifter, 1997). Children high on negative reactivity were more likely to be uncooperative, although this was mediated by the exercise of maternal control or the child’s own self-regulatory capabilities.

Research on temperament and conscience underscores the importance of affective processes in the development of conscience and the recognition that the effects of parental practices can be mediated by the young child’s temperament. This affirms the long-recognized truism that parenting must be calibrated to the child’s behavioral style but also highlights that different children can be morally compliant for different reasons. For some, cooperation springs predominantly from broader capacities for self-regulation that are manifested in many contexts. For others, maintaining good relations with caregivers and avoiding threats to relational harmony that accompany misconduct is motivational. For yet others, conscience is spurred by fearful and anxious feelings that naturally accompany disapproved conduct, and which are enlisted into parents’ socialization efforts.

Emotion is important to conscience development in other ways. The importance of self-referential emotions and the contexts in which they are elicited has already been noted. Emotion understanding is important to conscience as it facilitates young children’s comprehension of the consequences of actions for other people, particular victims of wrongdoing. In this regard, emotion understanding engages young children in the personal experience of others and how it is affected by their actions, and the anticipation of the emotional consequences for another of one’s behavior can be an important curb on antisocial conduct, or incentive to helping behavior (Dunn, 2006).

Empathy is another emotional resource for conscience development that emerges in early childhood. Empathy enhances the salience of another’s emotional experience and,
in circumstances of moral culpability, contributes to young children’s comprehension that another person, or the self, is responsible for another’s distress (Thompson & Hoffman, 1980; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). It is important to recognize, however, that the sight and sound of another person’s distress is motivationally complex for a young child, especially when the distressed person is a parent. Young children may respond sympathetically and helpfully but may also ignore, laugh at, or aggress toward another in distress or seek comfort for themselves (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). This suggests that it is unwise either to assume that empathy necessarily leads to prosocial behavior, especially for young children, or that moral conduct necessarily arises from empathy. The association between empathy and altruism, tenuous even in adults, is developmentally constructed throughout childhood and adolescence.

**Conscience and Parent–Child Interaction**

There are many ways that young children’s interactions with their caregivers contribute to conscience development. By the first birthday, for example, infants seek and use the emotional cues of another person to guide their responses in uncertain circumstances, which is an early manifestation of social referencing (Baldwin & Moses, 1996). Social referencing helps to protect the baby from harm, such as when an infant looks up while reaching toward the kitty litter and the parent responds with an imperative warning. In a more general sense, social referencing also contributes to the acquisition and internalization of behavioral standards when forbidden conduct (or its anticipation) is accompanied by the parent’s negative emotional expressions. Emde and his colleagues argue that toddlers sometimes engage in social referencing as they are anticipating acting in a disapproved manner to confirm the adult’s disapproval. After the expectation has been internalized, they comply in the parent’s absence as they mentally “reference the absent parent” (Emde, Biringen, Clyman, & Oppenheim, 1991).

As noted earlier, parental responses are also important to young children’s initial experiences of pride, shame, and guilt in moral contexts. As with social referencing, the parent’s response helps to endow the child’s behavior with affective valence, but late in the second year parental responses also begin to color the young child’s self-referential affect and beliefs. Over time, parental responses to the child’s morally relevant conduct, whether misbehavior or exemplary conduct, are likely to contribute to the development of the moral self, although there has been little research on this issue.

Another influence of parental behavior on conscience development is modeling. Developmental researchers have realized that individual differences in children’s imitation of parental behavior are motivated by broader features of the parent–child relationship, and may be related to other aspects of the child’s identification with the parent. Consistent with this view, Forman and Kochanska (2001) found that differences in toddlers’ willingness to imitate their mothers in a teaching task were longitudinally stable and predicted children’s compliance with the mother in disciplinary contexts, as well as in multiple assessments of conscience nearly 2 years later (Forman, Aksan, & Kochanska, 2004). Viewed in this light, responsive imitation contributes to early conscience development as part of the young child’s general motivation to behave consistently with the parent’s expectations and values.
As children proceed through toddlerhood, parents become increasingly concerned not only with behavioral management but also with instilling values and character. Studies of toddlers and preschoolers indicate that parental practices that are coercive and power assertive are successful in obtaining children’s immediate compliance, but frustration, anxiety, and sometimes defiance also result, as they do with older children. By contrast, parental practices that emphasize reasoning and provide justifications for expectations are more likely to foster internalized values in young children, even though children may also assert their autonomy through bargaining and negotiation (Kuczynski, Kochanska, Radke-Yarrow, & Girnius-Brown, 1987; Laible & Thompson, 2002; Kochanska, 1997b). Although younger children cannot comprehend complex discussions of moral conduct as readily as can older children, a parent’s clear explanations of causality, responsibility, consequences, and obligation—sometimes in the context of emotionally powerful communication—can help young children understand these issues even when they are caught up in conflict involving salient emotions and desires. For this reason, parents increasingly rely on verbal strategies over physical interventions for eliciting children’s compliance in the second year.

It is not only the use of explanations and justifications that is important, but also how these verbal strategies are conveyed. In one study, mothers who took the initiative to resolve conflict with their 30-month olds, who managed to avoid aggravating tension (such as through threats or teasing), and who explained and clarified their requests had children who, in assessments 6 months later, were more advanced in assessments of conscience (Laible, 2004a; Laible & Thompson, 2002). Similarly, in another study, 2- to 3-year-old children whose mothers used reasoning and humanistic concerns in resolving conflict with them were more advanced in measures of moral understanding in assessments in kindergarten and first grade (Dunn, Brown, & Maguire, 1995). Parental strategies that solicit compliance or correct misbehavior through rational means in the context of emotionally balanced, constructive initiatives contribute most to early conscience development.

Parental explanations in the context of parent–child conflict have some disadvantages for fostering moral internalization, however. In these situations, parents’ explanations are directly relevant to the immediate need for compliance, but the child’s negative emotional arousal, efforts to negotiate or compromise, insistence, or self-defense may undermine thoughtful processing of the adult’s message, especially if the child is young (Thompson, 2006a). As Kochanska (1993, 1997a) has also noted, for some children the anxiety associated with parental disapproval can overwhelm processing of the parent’s message. For this reason, Thompson and his colleagues have focused attention on parent–child conversation in other situations as forums for moral socialization (see Thompson, 2006b; Thompson, Laible, & Ontai, 2003). Parents often converse with children about the day’s events, for example, and these can include episodes of misbehavior or good conduct. In these conversations, parents convey morally relevant messages to a young child whose cognitive resources can be better focused on understanding what is said. In addition to moral lessons, these conversations are also forums in which the adult’s implicit value judgments, causal attributions, assumptions about culpability, and emotional inferences can influence the development of moral understanding and conscience.

There is increasing evidence that the content and quality of parent–child discourse during conversation about past events influences conscience development. Laible and
Thompson (2000) recorded conversations between 4-year olds and their mothers about events in the recent past when the child either misbehaved or behaved appropriately. Mothers who more frequently discussed people’s feelings in these conversations had children who, in independent assessments, were more advanced in conscience development. Even though maternal references to rules and the consequences of breaking them were also coded in these conversations, it was only maternal references to emotion that predicted conscience development. These findings were subsequently replicated in the prospective longitudinal study earlier described in which maternal references to feelings (but not references to rules and moral evaluations) during conflict with the child at 30 months predicted the child’s conscience development 6 months later (Laible & Thompson, 2002). Kochanska, Aksan, and Nichols (2003) found that by contrast, mothers who were conversationally more “power assertive” when discussing the child’s recent misbehavior—by conveying a critical or negative attitude, feelings of disappointment or anger, or providing reproach or punishment—had preschoolers with lower scores on measures of moral cognition. Thus, mothers who discuss past instances of misbehavior or good behavior and emphasize the emotional and personal consequences of moral conduct are more likely to foster conscience development than those who focus on judgments of rule-oriented compliance.

This conclusion is consistent with another feature of conversational quality associated with reminiscing about past events. Developmental research on young children’s event representation and autobiographical memory has shown that when parents talk about past events in a richly detailed and elaborative manner with young children, preschoolers are likely to achieve deeper memory for those events and greater understanding of them compared to children who participate in more directive or unelaborated conversation (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006). With respect to early conscience, researchers have likewise found that mothers who converse about recent instances of misbehavior and good behavior in an elaborative manner have children who are more advanced in conscience development (Laible, 2004b; Laible & Thompson, 2000). Outside of the context of parent–child conflict, conversations about moral conduct that are rich in detail and depth contribute to conscience development by enabling children to better understand the emotions, motivations, causal processes, and other personal qualities to moral conduct.

Taken together, there are a rich variety of ways that parents contribute to early conscience development through the emotional valence of their communications to children, their evaluations of children’s moral conduct, the examples they provide, the communication of expectations and values when enlisting compliance or sanctioning misbehavior, and in conversations about past events in which discussions of good and bad behavior often arise. Importantly, these parent–child interactions integrate multiple facets of conscience development: the affective coloring of approved or disapproved conduct that contributes to the motivation for future compliance, the cognitive understanding of values and expectations, the self-referential beliefs and affects by which young children perceive themselves as responsible moral actors, the representations of past experiences into which moral judgments and values are integrated, and the relationships in which parent–child communication is meaningful. We turn now to further exploration of this relational context.
Parent–Child Relationship Quality

Each aspect of parent–child interaction discussed above occurs in a relational context. As students of social development have long recognized, the overall quality of the parent–child relationship influences the impact and significance of these interactional processes. Not surprisingly, students of conscience development have devoted considerable attention to this.

To Kochanska (2002a; Kochanska & Aksan, 2006), a mutually responsive orientation between parent and child, characterized by mutual responsiveness and shared positive emotion, is central to the development of conscience. Such an orientation inducts young children into their first experience of a relational system of reciprocal cooperation that sensitizes them to the mutual obligations of close relationships. Although toddlers and preschoolers obviously cannot be equal contributors to such a relationship, they are nevertheless motivated by the parent’s affectionate, responsive care to respond constructively to adult initiatives, internalize parental values, and maintain and value a positive relationship. This portrayal of the motivational qualities of a mutually responsive parent–child relationship in the early years emphasizes the positive incentives to conscience development over a traditional emphasis on parental authority, and orients young children to the human dimensions of moral conduct (e.g., consequences for another person and/or the parent), consistent with their growth in developing theory of mind.

In this research, a mutually responsive orientation between parent and child encompasses two features: mutual (especially maternal) responsiveness and shared positive affect. These features are typically measured in multiple home observations in which global and microanalytic assessments are conducted and integrated to yield more reliable composite measures. In several studies, measures of this mutually responsive orientation have been found to predict later measures of conscience, such as the child’s cooperative conduct and rule-compliance without supervision (e.g., Kochanska, 1997b; Kochanska, Forman, & Coy, 1999; Kochanska & Murray, 2000; see reviews by Kochanska, 2002a, Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). Consistent with the formulations of attachment theory, this program of research indicates that a warm, responsive parent–child relationship contributes to growth in early conscience.

Several studies have helped to elucidate why this should be so. One reason is that mothers in mutually responsive relationships use less power assertion in their interactions with children, which may derive from their use of gentler, less coercive influence techniques (Kochanska, 1997b; Kochanska et al., 1999). Children in mutually responsive relationships also show greater empathic responsiveness to simulations of distress enacted by their mothers, and mothers themselves are more empathic, which may reflect a deeper emotional engagement in their relationship (Kochanska, 1997b; Kochanska et al., 1999). In a mediational analysis, Kochanska, Forman, Aksan, and Dunbar (2005) derived multiple assessments of parent–child relationship quality from home observations during the child’s first 2 years, assessed the child’s positive affect in interaction with mother and willing (committed) compliance at 33 months, and then conducted assessments of moral emotion (guilt/shame during contrived mishaps in the lab) at 45 months and moral conduct (resistance to cheating incentives) and moral cognition (story completion responses) at 56 months. Although a mutually responsive parent–child relationship in infancy was directly
associated with later moral emotion, this relationship was indirectly related to the other conscience measures. Moral cognition and moral conduct were each indirectly associated with the parent–child relationship through the child’s positive affect with the parent at 33 months; the effect on moral conduct was additionally mediated by the child’s willing (or committed) compliance at the same age. In short, a warm, responsive parent–child relationship early in life contributes to conscience development in part by inaugurating more positive, constructive patterns of parent–child interaction in early childhood that motivate the child’s increasingly self-regulated compliance.

Children’s characteristics are important to understanding the influence of a mutually responsive parent–child relationship. As earlier noted, Kochanska (1995, 1997a; Kochanska, Aksan, & Joy, 2007) found that children’s temperament interacts with the quality of care in the development of conscience. For relatively fearless children, the motivational incentives of this warm, responsive parent–child relationship are important; for fearful children, conscience is fostered by gentle discipline practices, which are also a feature of this mutually responsive relationship. There is also increasing evidence from molecular genetics research that specific gene alleles interact with parental responsive care in contributing to children’s developmental outcomes. As one illustration, Kochanska, Kim, Barry, and Philibert (2011) found that the association between measures of maternal responsive care in early childhood and conscience at 67 months was moderated by children’s genotype, such that children with the short 5-HTTLPR allele had particularly poor performance on measures of moral cognition and the moral self when they had previously experienced unresponsive care, but children with the same allele growing up with responsive care showed strong later performance on these conscience measures. This is consistent with the view that genes contribute differential susceptibility to environmental influences, helping to account for positive developmental outcomes when environmental conditions are supportive, but poorer outcomes when environments are averse.

A mutually responsive parent–child relationship is not the same as a secure attachment, although similarities between these formulations and attachment theory have already been noted. Indeed, several studies have found that securely attached children are more cooperative and compliant than insecurely attached children (Londerville & Main, 1981) and are stronger on measures of conscience development (Kochanska, 1995; Laible & Thompson, 2000; see Thompson, 2008, for a review). Attachment theorists argue, as does Kochanska, that a secure attachment in early childhood creates a more supportive, harmonious parent–child relationship that makes a young child more cooperative and responsive to the parent’s socialization initiatives (Thompson, 2008; Waters, Kondo-Ikemura, & Posada, 1991). Attachment theorists further argue that attachment security influences the development of young children’s mental representations of themselves, other people, and relationships, a formulation that is relevant to conscience and the development of an understanding of values, relational obligations, and the moral self (Thompson & Winer, in press).

A secure attachment may also be important to conscience development as a moderator of the influence of other parental practices. In a longitudinal study, Kochanska, Aksan, Knaack, and Rhines (2004) found that for securely attached children (assessed at 14 months), the parent’s responsiveness and use of gentle discipline (from 14 to 45 months) predicted conscience (assessed at 56 months), but for insecurely attached children there
was no such association. There is also longitudinal evidence that a secure attachment helps
to amplify the benefits of early, positive parent–child influences for later conscience de-
velopment (Kochanska, Woodard, Kim, Koenig, Yoon, & Barry, 2010).

Finally, what about fathers? Like most research in social and personality development,
research on conscience development has focused primarily on maternal effects. The few
studies that have included fathers permit a comparison of mother–child with father–child
influences, and they generally conclude that there are similar influences but stronger as-
sociations between mother–child interaction and conscience development. One study, for
example, found that in infancy, maternal responsiveness and the security of mother–child
relationships was associated with the child's cooperative conduct, but this was not true
of fathers (Kochanska, Aksan, & Carlson, 2005). For both fathers and mothers, power
assertion is negatively associated with conscience development, but coercive discipline
practices may be a more salient paternal influence on young children (Kochanska et al.,
2007; Kochanska, Aksan, Prisco, & Adams, 2008). As in other areas of social development,
however, direct comparisons of maternal and paternal influences on young children may
not be fully informative because each parent may have specific influences that derive from
unique qualities of each parent's relationship with the child. For fathers, for example, in-
fluences associated with emotion regulation and impulse control may be most important.
Further research on these issues is needed (see, e.g., Cabrera & Tamis–LeMonda, 2012;
Lamb, 2012).

Implications

Research on early conscience offers important new ideas concerning how young children
become responsible moral agents. Because moral development builds on children's broader
social–cognitive understanding, research on conscience highlights that early–developing
sensitivity to people's goals, feelings, and welfare provides powerful resources to moral
sensibility. The growth of the moral self indicates that moral socialization in the early years
is not just a matter of developing behavioral compliance but also of self-understanding.
This research literature has highlighted the constructive influences of multiple dimen-
sions of temperamental individuality and of emotional responsiveness on moral sensibility.
Research on conscience also indicates that parental influences extend well beyond the
discipline encounter to include emotional communication in infancy, multifaceted fea-
tures of conversation in early childhood, and broader relational influences that have direct
and indirect consequences for the growth of conscience. These findings are theoreti-
cally important for indicating that the origins of a humanistic, cooperative, and relational
moral orientation can be found in early childhood, and in the development of supportive
parent–child relationships and the conceptual skills of the early years. These findings also
have practical implications for fostering character education (Thompson, Thompson, &
Winer, in press) and social–emotional learning (Domitrovich & et al., 2012).

The most important implications of research on early conscience are for moral devel-
opment theory. Conscience research shows that young children are developing a moral
awareness that is based on their sensitivity to other people's feelings and intentions, their
developing self-awareness as persons who seek to do the right thing, and their experience
of cooperative relationships of mutual obligation in the family. These early achievements
establish the foundation for later advances in moral development and raise new questions about how these developmental processes extend into later childhood and adolescence (Thompson, 2011, 2012). Later developments in theory of mind (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 2002), for example, may contribute to older children’s understanding of the influences of mental biases, personality differences, and cultural background on moral beliefs and judgments. Growth in moral identity may extend the moral self of early childhood to confront later experiences of values conflict, personal integrity, and relational loyalty to family and friends (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Parent–child conversation is important to conscience development and also to the development of moral character later in childhood (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004), particularly as these conversations engage children in deeper analysis of everyday moral challenges. Contributing further to the development of moral character and personality are the challenges and opportunities presented by peer relationships, school and extracurricular activities, and civic engagement in adolescence (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007).

In short, research on early conscience offers developmental theorists the opportunity to begin constructing a lifespan theory of moral development (Thompson, 2012). Bridging research on conscience with studies of the development of moral character, judgment, and identity at later ages has the potential of situating moral development within a much broader and sophisticated range of conceptual, relational, affective, and self-referential processes than has previously been true.

**Future Directions**

The preceding paragraphs outline an ambitious agenda for future research in this field. In addition, there are a number of important issues associated with conscience development meriting further research.

One issue is addressing concerns about the breadth of generalizability of findings from the study of early conscience. The need to attend to the role of fathers is one example. Another concerns the extension of this research to samples of broader ethnic and sociodemographic diversity, a task in which Kochanska’s and Thompson’s labs are currently engaged. There is also the challenge of understanding better the mutual influences between parent and child in the development of conscience. In the research discussed in this chapter, the influence of young children on conscience development is considerable, incorporating their temperamental individuality, developing conceptual skills and emotional sensitivity, their roles in parent–child conversation about everyday concerns, and the extent to which their cooperation with adult requests is grudging or enthusiastic. Although at younger ages, children are not as equal participants in the process of moral development as they will be later, a better understanding of their contributions and their influence on parents’ socialization efforts is needed.

Another issue for future study concerns the representational dimensions of early conscience. As earlier noted, studies of developing theory of mind expand understanding of the social–cognitive foundations of early moral sensibility. At the same time, attachment theorists have devoted considerable attention to the mental representations of self and others associated with the security of attachment. Theory of mind research focuses primarily on developmental changes in early mental representations, while attachment researchers
emphasize individual differences in these representations. How can these perspectives be integrated in the study of conscience development? One way is by examining the relational catalysts to early emotional and psychological understanding that contribute to the development of moral sensibility in young children. By understanding better the interactions between differential characteristics of parent–child relationships; emotional communication and discourse; young children’s inferences about other people’s feelings, intentions, and goals; and conscience development, it becomes possible to integrate these perspectives in early childhood research. At older ages, this integrative research can focus on the intergenerational appropriation of morally relevant judgments, attribution biases, and other social–cognitive orientations from patterns of parent–child interaction and communication.

Another focus of future research concerns the development of self–referential processes associated with moral development. In early childhood, the “moral self” has been of special interest; at older ages, the focus has been on moral identity and character (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). In each case, researchers have been concerned with the centrality of moral values and concerns to self-understanding. But little is known of the developmental processes associated with developing moral self-awareness. This is important because of evidence from research on conscience development and at older ages suggests that moral self-awareness is an important mediator of moral conduct. If this is so, then a better understanding of the relational influences, conceptual advances, and emotional influences on the development of moral self/identity/character is an important research task.

Finally, it is important to note the relevance of this research to issues in developmental psychopathology. In a sense, research on conscience concerns the early foundations for the development of concern and compassion for others, the absence of which is a core component of psychopathy and other psychological disorders. Understanding the core contributions to the growth of compassion and an emotional connection to others may aid in the development of preventive efforts and, perhaps also, therapeutic interventions in the future.

Taken together, research on conscience provides developmentalists with a portrayal of young children as intuitive moralists who become responsible moral agents as they develop social–cognitive capabilities and self–referential understanding in the context of supportive relationships. This is a portrayal of early moral development that enables researchers to explore the growth of moral sensibility throughout life.

References


Introduction

Internalization refers to the phenomenon whereby ideas, such as beliefs, values, and practices that are initially external to an individual become incorporated into the individual’s thoughts and actions (Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997). Theoretical understanding of the process by which this comes about is undergoing major revision. Prior to the 1980s, internalization was considered to be an outcome of socialization, which at that time was itself conceptualized in a unidirectional and deterministic manner (see Grusec, Chaparro, Johnston, & Sherman, this volume). An implicit goal of early socialization theory was to understand the continuity of values from parents to children and, more generally, the process by which society and culture are reproduced in each succeeding generation (Corsaro, 1997). The products of internalization were considered in two ways: the transmission of cultural content such as values, beliefs, and practices from the older generation to the younger generation and the fostering of conformity to the demands and expectations of family and societal authorities (Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997). The process of internalization was conceived as intergenerational transmission whereby children’s acquisition of values was accomplished through the direct action of socializing agents.

This idea of socialization has been critiqued by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists at both the macro level of individual and society and the micro level of parent–child relations. Early theories of socialization depicted society to be much more integrated and human nature as much more conforming than they really are (Wrong, 1961). The idea of intergenerational transmission neglected the phenomenon of social and cultural change in values (Straus, 1992; Valsiner, 2000). Moreover, socialization theory underestimated the active influence of children on parents and the innovative capacities of children as well as parents in interpreting or resisting the ideas and values of the previous generation (Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997).

Most researchers today endorse bidirectional conceptions of socialization, although there is a debate regarding behavioral/interactional versus dialectical/relational formulations of bidirectionality (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). However, studies linking parent variables,
conceptualized as causes, and child variables, conceptualized as effects, remain dominant in basic research or applied interventions. The principal question asked by researchers concerns the process by which conformity is fostered or similarity is transmitted between the generations. However, an exclusive focus on continuity is only possible from a mechanistic perspective of causality. Continuity and conformity are not the expected outcome in organismic/dialectical approaches to human development, which have a defining focus on qualitative change or the emergence of novelty (Kuczynski & De Mol, in press). Parents themselves can change with time, and children’s ideas about values can be different from those of their parents because children are exposed to out-of-home environments, with competing values (e.g., Goodnow, 1997), or because of the effects that children’s genetic tendencies have on their values (Knafo & Spinath, 2011). Therefore, change or difference is not an error but an expected outcome of the internalization process.

In this chapter we argue that internalization is a continuing process in the lives of parents and children that involves the construction of new ideas, not just the reproduction of old ones. The first part of this chapter provides various definitions of values and how they have been conceptualized and describes social relational theory (Kuczynski & Parkin 2007; Kuczynski & De Mol, in press) and its basic assumptions, including human agency and dialectical causality. We then propose a social relational model of the process and products of internalization that links micro processes in the family with macro processes of generational change and cultural change due to the acculturation of immigrant families. In the last part we use the model as a framework for organizing existing research and suggesting new directions. In particular we will cite new research on the process of family acculturation, which highlights the special problems faced by immigrant families and sheds new light on the impact of context on the processes of socialization and internalization in the family.

**Theoretical Background and Definition of Key Terms**

**The Nature of Values: Diverse, Contested, and Changing**

Values are desirable, abstract, trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in people’s lives and as criteria they use to select, justify, and evaluate actions, people, and events (Schwartz, 1992). Broadly speaking, “Values are present whenever people judge some ways of acting, thinking or feeling to be more desirable, more worthwhile, or more important than others” (Goodnow, 1997, p. 341). However, not all values are equally important for parents (Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000), and qualitatively different interactions and emotions are engaged depending on the content of a value. Distinctions have been made between standards that elicit long-term versus short-term socialization goals (Kuczynski, 1984) and between moral, personal, conventional, and prudential domains of behavior between values that reflect generalizable principles about fairness (moral), on the one hand, to contextual rules and regularities that vary by culture (conventional), on the other hand (Smetana, 1997).

Cross-cultural research from an internalization model (Schwartz, 1992, 2010) has focused on a system of 10 values, representing two main dimensions, of openness to change (stimulation, self-direction) versus conservatism (conformity, tradition, and security), as
well as self-transcendence (universalism, benevolence) versus self-enhancement (power, achievement). The tenth value, hedonism, reflects both openness and self-enhancement. Relevant to the moral aspect of some values is a distinction between values focused on promoting mainly group interests (conservatism and self-transcendence), with other values focused on the self. Schwartz’s (e.g., 1992) seminal work has shown, across hundreds of samples from over 70 cultural groups, that these 10 values have a cross-culturally shared meaning in the organization, compatibilities, and conflicts between values across cultures. Although the meaning of most values is similar across cultures (although some values, such as spirituality, differ in meanings across cultures; Schwartz, 1992), the importance attributed to these values varies substantially across cultures (e.g., Schwartz & Rubel, 2005) and from one socialization agent to another (e.g., Knafo & Schwartz, 2001). Thus, different cultures, teachers, and parents may promote different values, which will be most evident in the case of migration. This potential for discrepancy introduces the potential of change as values are discussed and negotiated between generations during the process of socialization.

Moral values are often distinguished from other kinds of values in socialization research because certain modes of behaving or thinking are defined, justified, and evaluated as such by socializing agents and are singled out for special training. Examples of actions toward others that consistently invoke moral reasoning and reactions include harm to another, unfairness, and unequal treatment (Smetana, 1997). However, there are limitations to a conception of morality exclusively focused on harm when considering the phenomenon of what people internalize and practice. From a cultural perspective it has been argued that alternative moralities might exist based on natural law, justice, community, and divinity (Shweder, Much, Mahaptra, & Park, 1997). Moreover, the particular practices to which moral reasoning has been applied, including unequal treatment of women, slavery, and numerous forms of discrimination, have differed over time and across cultures. This is because individuals use complex forms of reasoning and are inconsistent in their application giving considerable scope for interpretation and conflict (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). Other behaviors such religious practices and beliefs, what one may eat, whom may associate with or exclude, how one may dress, sexual practices, and other forms of social regulation have at different times and in different cultures been treated by socializing agents as having a “moral-like” status. In this chapter, the discussion of morality is generally merged with other values because the focus is on a feature of values that have received little attention—namely, the possibility of intergenerational change.

Social Relational Theory: Co-Construction of Internalization

Social relational theory (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; Kuczynski & De Mol, in press) is an integrative framework for envisioning processes and outcomes in parent–child relationships and socialization in a dynamic way. A defining feature of social relational theory that distinguishes it from behavioral models of process (Patterson, 1997) is its foundation in dialectics. Dialectics is a meta-theory about the inherent holistic and dynamic nature of all phenomena. This framework asserts that all phenomena and every process consist of an opposing system of forces that actively interact to produce continuous qualitative change. There are a number of implications of dialectics for studying dynamic processes of socialization and internalization. First, the principal active components are parents and children
who are equally agents with inherent capacities for interpreting messages and acting upon them. This perspective leads to an empirical interest in what individuals do, think, and experience as they engage in interactions with each other and events in their lives. It guides researchers to ask questions of parents and children in a parallel manner, paying equal attention to the child-to-parent and parent-to-child directions of influence (Kuczynski, 2003).

Second, dialectics entails a nonlinear conception of causation. The antecedents of change are conceptualized as contradiction. Any system will have aspects that are shared or congruent as well as aspects that are dissonant. For instance, parents and children, as agents, have separate and potentially conflicting needs, perspectives, and goals, which lead to tensions conceptualized as conflict, ambivalence, ambiguity, and expectancy violations (Kuczynski, Pitman, & Mitchell, 2009). Such tensions are potentially generative because they entail points of uncertainty. They provide opportunities for individuals to create new meanings to temporarily resolve the contradiction, in a novel synthesis that has the potential to send them on new trajectories for action and understanding (Kuczynski et al., 2009; Valsiner, 2006. This cognitive conception of bidirectional causality is consistent with Sameroff’s (2009) transactional model of development. Bidirectional influence comes about as parents and children interpret or construct meanings from each other’s behaviors, and resist, negotiate, and accommodate each other’s perspectives within the constraints of their relationship (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007).

Third, the dialectical principle of holism leads researchers to consider the nature of the systems in which the components are embedded. Although the model draws attention to the separate perspectives of parents and children, both parents and children must nevertheless cope with or resolve conflicting views because they share a long-term interdependent relationship. Also pertinent to the principle of holism are the relations between the parent–child relationship and larger ecological contexts. An important challenge for theories of socialization is to link analyses of micro processes in the family with macro level social change (Boehnke, Ittel, & Baier, 2002). In the next section, we present a social relational model of parent and child internalization that explores the possibilities of such a linkage (see Figure 5.1).

The bottom of Figure 5.1 depicts the micro processes in the family conceptualized as dialectical transactions between the parent and the child. At the top is depicted the ecological context of parent–child relationships conceptualized as culture and generation. At the center is the expected dialectical outcome of internalization, a synthesis that incorporates both similarity and change. Throughout the model we consider the separate perspectives of parents and children their separate actions as agents, as well as the relational and macro contexts that constrain their actions as agents.

Agency in Relationship Context

Recent theorizing on socialization has incorporated a much-expanded interest in human agency in bidirectional transactions between parents and children (Cummings & Schermerhorn, 2003; Kuczynski 2003; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008). During the 1990s, developmental researchers began to abandon transmission models of internalization in favor of a view of children as actively constructing their socialization experiences.
Figure 5.1  Dialectical Model of Internalization
Credit: Adapted from Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997.
Leon Kuczynski and Ariel Knafo

(Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Kuczynski et al., 1997; Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993; Smetana, 1997). All products of internalization, even that of intergenerational similarity, must be constructed by children from the messages and reactions presented by their social context. Children make their own sense of social experiences by interpreting the messages that they receive, the reactions evoked by their behavior, and their own experiences as victims and observers of social transgressions. From this activity they construct distinctions between various domains of behavior and develop different modes of reasoning to work through the conflicts and dilemmas that confront them and use these rationales to defend their positions on future occasions (Smetana, 1997; 2011).

Parents are active in packaging the message so that children can accurately interpret and accept the parent’s perspective (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). However, the constructive capacities of children places limits on the kinds of messages parents might attempt to communicate and how accurately the child interprets them or accepts them (Smetana, 1997). Although children tend to accept their parents’ views on moral and conventional issues, children are likely to disagree with parents’ right to prescribe excluding individuals on the basis of race or ethnicity (Killen et al., 2002) or actions judged to be immoral, unjust, or unfair (Turiel, 2002). The development of difference is particularly likely in the personal domain where adolescents show less agreement with parental values for hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, and achievement (Knafo & Schwartz, 2008).

Sociocultural interpretations of the construction process take the potential for innovation a step further by considering the process by which children apply their newly received knowledge. Lawrence and Valsiner (1993, 2003) consider internalization in conjunction with the parallel process of externalization. In their view, internalization refers to the cognitive processing that takes place as children evaluate and attempt to understand the social environment in terms of their personal experiences, needs, and ways of knowing. Externalization refers to the further processing that takes place as children act on their personal understanding during social interaction. Thus, innovative construction occurs at two levels. Messages, values, and other information emanating from parents or the culture undergo one process of interpretation and transformation as they are internalized and another process of interpretation and transformation as they are externalized. As a result of different life experiences and transactions with each other and other working models available in their ecological contexts, each individual in the family develops somewhat different personal working models of the ideas and values that are the product of their internalization processes.

A tenet of social relation theory is that agency and influence must be understood in the context of the parent–child relationship. Parents and children exercise their choices not as isolated individuals but with reference to their social relationships (Ratner, 2000). Parents are well placed in the relationship to constrain and channel children’s internalization processes (Kuczynski & Grusec, 1997). Their role as providers of attachment security in a long-term relationship and society’s legitimization of the parent’s power and responsibility over early socialization give parents more resources and also opportunity to influence the child than any other adults. However, the relationship context also incorporates enabling features that afford children considerable scope to exercise their agency or to negotiate the nature of the constraints placed upon them (Kuczynski, 2003). Features of the parent–child relationship such as its long history and anticipated future course (Lollis, 2003; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997), its complex combination of vertical (attachment, authority) and
horizontal (intimacy, companionship) power arrangements (Oliphant & Kuczynski, 2011), and the greater interdependence of the participants during everyday life create a context where parents and children are both receptive and vulnerable to each other’s influence.

The parent–child relationship, therefore, constantly offers up contradictions that feed into the dialectical process where not only new meanings but also leeway for the expression of agency are created. For example, parents may be willing to tolerate resistance or different points of view because they seek to maintain a positive parent–child relationship or wish to foster autonomy, independence, and assertiveness in their children (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). Parents communicate a variety of positions with regard to their acceptance of children’s behaviors ranging from what is ideal to what is acceptable, tolerable, or “out of the question” (Goodnow, 1994). Children, in turn, discover how much value stretch their parents’ position affords and how much leeway there is for their own creative interpretation or resistance (Goodnow, 1997).

**Agency in Ecological Context**

The social transactions between parents and children that contribute to the process of value internalization do not occur in isolation. Parent–child dynamics are influenced by culture, and individuals draw on many sources of ideas, from their ecological context, which they incorporate during internalization. These include the generation and the culture in which each individual is born and to which each maintains connections.

**Generation**

The concept of generation is concerned with continuity and change produced through the agency of people born and learning at succeeding periods of historical time (Mayall, 2002). Generational change comes about through external forces and collective actions such as immigration, war, economic changes, new technology, and the introduction of new ideas by individuals and groups. In Western cultures there have been continual changes in values regarding authority, the environment, gender equality, civil rights, children’s rights, norms for sexual behavior, and acceptance of diversity in sexual orientation and other areas of human difference. In cultures undergoing modernization there have been rapid generational increases in the psychological value of children, as well as increases of individual values and decreases of collectivistic values (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). In China, norms for Confucian values such as filial piety are undergoing generational change due to engagement of women in the workplace and social experiments such as the one child policy (Goh & Kuczynski, 2009).

According to Mannheim (1928/1952), young people form a generation by being exposed to specific social, historical, and political events and ideas of a particular time period. They develop shared ways of interpreting and evaluating situations, and, in some cases, form generational groups that react to issues in similar ways. Sociologists argue that the process of forming a generation begins in early childhood as children form solidarity groups with peers (Mayall, 2002), a process that Corsaro and Eder (1990) describe as the formation of peer cultures. *Peer culture* is a stable set of activities of routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers (Corsaro &
Eder, 1990). For their part, parents also have continuing input from their own generational peers as support for existing working models and as input for social change.

As depicted at the top of Figure 5.1, parents, in part, form their working models by internalizing ideas, values, and outlooks prevalent in the collective models of their generation. Parents manifest their generational working models by carrying forward in time ideas that they formed in the past. The values and ideas of parents may differ from those of their children who are forming a generation of their own through interactions with their own peers. Continuity in the working models of parents and children is established as parents foster ideas from their generation. Although parental influence on values is important early in children’s development, it becomes progressively less exclusive as children age and gain access to generational influences such as schools, peers, and social media. Changes in working models of parents also occur as they continue to develop and as ideas from the child’s generation feed back to parents.

Culture

The idea of culture as a working model builds on constructionist views of culture as a personal system of meanings constructed by individuals in the process of social interaction (Valsiner, 2000). Although concepts such as collectivism and individualism suggest that cultural groups have a shared understanding of the desirable ways of behaving, thinking, or feeling, there is considerable diversity of values within cultural groups (Matsumoto, 2001; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). There are also contradictions, ambiguity, and injustices embedded in cultural practices that contain the seeds for social change (Turiel, 2002). In cultures that might publicly stress connectedness, interdependence, and duties, some groups enjoy greater freedoms that are embedded in the structure of society and the makeup of norms and social practices (Turiel & Wainryb, 2000).

When families immigrate to a country whose dominant culture differs from their own, they willingly or unwillingly engage in a process of cultural, individual, and family change known as acculturation (Kuczynski & Navara, 2006; Kuczynski, Navara & Boiger, 2011). For immigrant parents, acculturation adds to the problems of generational differences in increasing distance between parent and child values (Hadjar et. al., 2012). Parents’ working models of culture are formed in the culture of origin, but feedback from that culture is disrupted through the event of immigration. This separation has consequences for the working models of both the immigrant parents and their children. Children’s working models of culture are rapidly formed through interactions with working models of the adopted culture. Separated from the supporting context of the culture of their parents, children’s construction of continuity with the parents’ culture relies almost exclusively on the strategies and efforts of their parents.

As with generation, working models of culture contribute to both cultural stability and change. Research suggests that immigrants who attempt to preserve their culture in a host country but are disconnected from social forces within their country of origin preserve a relatively static working model of culture that eventually becomes outdated. Farver, Bhadha & Naramj (2002) found that South Asian immigrant parents become “more Indian” than those left behind as they attempt to transplant and maintain traditional values and beliefs in their new environment.
The Products of Socialization as Novel Syntheses

The central portion of the model depicts the expected outcomes of internalization incorporating both continuity and change in parents’ and children’s working models. The dialectical idea that socialization outcomes are temporary syntheses provides a dynamic way of reformulating value internalization and behavioral conformity. The concept of working models of internalization (Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997) and culture (Kuczynski & Navara, 2006) replaces the deterministic conception of internalization as a static transmission of similarity (Straus, 1992) with a conception that internalization is an ongoing process where beliefs and values are continuously being constructed and challenged throughout life (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993).

Children’s conformity to parental standards can also be conceptualized as a dialectical synthesis. Kuczynski and Hildebrandt (1997) proposed a relational view of conformity, arguing that socially competent children display a cooperative, co-regulated, and nonexact form of conformity and resistance called accommodation and negotiation. Accommodation, conceptualized as compliance with parental requests within the constraints of a close relationship, conveys both an expectation of a cooperative response and also that the form of the cooperation will be chosen by the recipient rather than by the sender of a request. Similarly, the construct of negotiation conveys the distinctive standards of noncompliance within relationships where children overtly express their resistance in a way that takes their parents into account.

The implication is that difference, not just similarity, is a necessary product of the socialization and internalization processes. Many transformations occur between the “input” of the parent’s expectations and the “output” of the child’s response. Similarly, parents are not unquestioning conduits who transmit fixed products of their own childhood internalization without change, to their children (Kuczynski et al., 1997). A perspective on parents as agents focuses attention on parents’ interpretive and constructive activities with regard to their own internalized products. By interacting with their children and the ideas available in their children’s generation, parents may actively confront and evaluate the adequacy of the attitudes, beliefs, and values and social definitions that they developed during their own socialization history (Kuczynski et al., 1997). As a consequence, parents may wish to promote values in their children that differ from the values that they acquired.

Current Research

This section will use the paths illustrated in Figure 5.1 as a framework for reviewing the research literature on socialization and internalization. The first part of the review will consider available evidence supporting a view of internalization outcomes that incorporates change and difference. The second part explores research on parent–child dynamics, conceptualized as processes of internalization and externalization, following the parent-to-child and child-to-parent paths of influence. Previous reviews have particularly focused on these processes in the contexts of generational change (Kuczynski, et al., 1997) and cultural change (Kuczynski & Navara 2006; Kuczynski et al., 2011). Here the goal is to highlight new literature on intergenerational change and continuity in both of these contexts.
Continuity and Change

Empirically, evidence for continuity has produced complex findings. Parent–child value similarity, indicated by correlations across families, varies substantially across value domains, cultures, age groups, and specific parent–child gender combinations (Boehnke, 2001; Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988). Regarding the content of values, an interesting finding is that parent–child correlations tend to be highest for values of tradition and power (Boehnke, 2001; Knafo & Schwartz, 2008), the two values that show the lowest mean importance across cultures (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). This raises the possibility that continuity in values across generations depends on families having values that diverge from those of the mainstream culture. Bengtson and Troll (1978) argued that adolescents growing up in forerunner families, that is, families whose opinions are outside of the cultural mainstream, are especially prone to developing an ideology different from that encountered in their immediate social environment, and this eventually affects their parents as well. Thus, intergenerational change may be initiated by those located in the ideological outskirts of society (see also Mannheim, 1952; Knafo & Galansky, 2008).

Finally, the specific gender combination of the parent–child dyad is associated with differences in similarity between parents and their children (Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988). Knafo and Schwartz (2009) showed that in the values showing the highest degrees of sex differences (self-enhancement and self-transcendence), adolescents tended to be more accepting of the values they ascribed to the same-sex parent, whereas no such effect was found for other values.

The most systematic study of values bearing on generational change concerns the childrearing values of obedience and independence. Alwin (1988, 1996) documented decreases in the value of strict conformity, manners, patriotism, and religious observance and increases in the value of independence and tolerance in the United States and several European and Asian countries throughout the twentieth century. For this particular set of values, the weight of the evidence is that social change was attributable to generational replacement rather than developmental transformation across the lifespan of the individual (Alwin, 1996). That is, change at the societal level is consolidated as the parental generation dies out or loses influence and is replaced by the child’s generation.

There is no question that children of immigrants develop working models of culture that are different from those of their parents. The values of children of immigrants, especially those concerning openness to change as compared to conservatism are more similar to those of their nonimmigrant peers than they are to those of their parents (Cashmore & Goodnow, 1985; Knafo & Schwartz, 2001; Nauck, 2001). In a study of six majority, minority, and immigrant ethnic groups in Germany and Israel, parent–adolescent value similarity was higher in majority families than in migrant/minority families (Hadjar et al., 2012), suggesting that the encounter with a majority culture increases adolescents’ distance from the values of their parents (see also Knafo & Schwartz, 2001), thereby causing intergenerational change.

Parke and Buriel (1998) discuss assimilation and biculturalism as the trajectories followed by most children within a few generations following immigration into the United States. Most European immigrants develop assimilated working models in part because they already share some of the ideas of earlier European immigrants who formed the host culture. Some continuity of traditional culture is maintained within the assimilated
cultural groups in the form of vestigial “symbolic ethnicity” (Alba, 1990) that imposes little cost on everyday life. Non-European immigrants including Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans tended to retain aspects of their cultures and beliefs within a positive dual frame of reference. However, the nature of the ethnic identity continues to undergo transformations the longer the group lives alongside the majority culture.

Parents’ Internalization and Externalization

**PARENTAL INTERNALIZATION**

We begin with parents’ internalization during adulthood, which we conceptualize as a process by which parents reconstruct their own working models to make them more adaptive for their own well-being and for the well-being of their children. Evidence for this process is inherent in clinical research and research on identity formation where rejection or reconstruction of previous socialization experiences is a step toward a more positive developmental trajectory (Kuczynski et al., 1997). As one example, research using an adult attachment interview (Bretherton, Biringen, & Ridgeway, 1991) found that many mothers rejected aspects of their own childrearing history and endeavored to rear their children according to methods and values different from the ones favored by their own parents. There is also a growing body of research on children’s influence on parents’ continuing adult development. Parents’ interactions with children directly (Kuczynski, et al., submitted; Peters, 1985) and indirectly (De Mol & Buyssse, 2008; Dillon, 2002; Frankel, 1991; Palkowitz, Marks, Appleby, & Holmes, 2003) influence parents to change their values. The reasons for parental receptivity to children’s influence on their own behavior and values are diverse. Parents report that children offer compelling and legitimate reasons for requesting parental change, that mutual receptivity to influence is inherent in the parent–child relationship, and that parents comply to further relational goals such as improving the relationship or fostering children’s sense of influence in the relationship (Kuczynski et al., submitted).

Internalization processes are more salient when parents experience a cross-cultural relocation and are exposed to societal values that differ from their earlier beliefs (Fuligni, 1998; Phalet & Schonpflug, 2001; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000). Parents may reevaluate and reconstruct their values, beliefs, and practices in order to adapt to the changed environment and opportunities of the new culture, or in response to influences from their own children. In order to do this, parents may have reference to the values that they personally endorse as well as values that they may not endorse but perceive as widespread in the culture in which they and their children will live (Tam, Lee Kim, Li, & Chao, 2012). This process may entail considerable ambivalence—not only with respect to the costs and benefits of abandoning, adapting, or maintaining specific values, beliefs, and practices. How much the parent has invested in these particular values influences the level of importance placed upon the socialization attempts, the strategies adopted, and how vigorously the parent uses these strategies (Padilla-Walker & Thompson, 2005). How parents respond to competing goals is a fertile arena for research. Possible responses include shedding of cultural values that are no longer adaptive in the new situation (Berry, 1997) or reevaluating and selecting core features of their ethnic culture to transmit to children (Nagel, 1994).
Parents manifest their internalized working models in the socialization goals for children and their childrearing strategies. Parenting strategies for fostering values has been the traditional emphasis of the socialization literature (see Grusec et al. this volume). For example, Grusec and Goodnow (1994) argued that an optimal socialization approach requires that parents take into account their children’s agency and outlined parental strategies for accurately communicating and generating motivational acceptance of their messages.

Recent research on family acculturation has broadened the study of parenting strategies by distinguishing the processes of socialization and enculturation. Socialization refers to the direct and often intentional process of communicating cultural values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors through modeling, instruction, and control strategies. Enculturation is a transmission process that is largely unconscious, where values and beliefs are communicated through the process of engaging in the mundane, everyday activities and practices of a particular cultural group (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002; Goodnow, 1997).

For parents raising children within their own cultural context, the transmission of cultural values and practices is often taken for granted because parental socialization efforts are supported by enculturation. Group processes, such as living in communities that share similar values and practices support the transmission of parental values independently of parents’ individual efforts (Harris, 1995). However, for immigrant parents preserving and transmitting ethnic values in a new culture is more difficult because they may not have the benefit of enculturation and must rely on their own conscious efforts and strategies. In addition, the working models developed in the culture of origin may contain features that are unsupported, denigrated, or maladaptive for success in the new environment.

Given this macro context, it is likely that immigrant parents develop specialized strategies for the unique problem of fostering ethnic values in a new culture. Goodnow (1997) provided an important direction by proposing two proactive strategies, prearming and cocooning, that protect the child from the influence of the surrounding culture. Prearming involves anticipating the potential conflicting values that the child may encounter and providing the child with a set of arguments and skills to deal with those encounters. Prearming strategies range from helpful advice from parents on how to resist competing values to the disparagement of opposing values. Hughes and colleagues (2006) found that African Americans used two proactive strategies: cultural socialization—teaching the child about ethnic pride, history, and heritage; and preparation for bias—teaching about discrimination and bias that the child will encounter over his or her lifetime. Evidence of prearming strategies was found in a study of Jamaican families living in Canada (Navara & Lollis, 2009). The adolescent children of these families reported that their parents used stories to communicate their own cultural advantages in comparison to the dominant Canadian culture. In addition, parents told stories of their own experiences with prejudice and stereotypes living in Canada in an attempt to assist their children in their own encounters with discrimination.

Cocooning (Goodnow, 1997) can be considered as a form intentional enculturation whereby the parent deliberately harnesses the environmental support of enculturation to compliment their efforts of direct socialization. Cocooning strategies may include tactics such as choosing to live in isolated religious communities, choosing to live in ethnic neighborhoods, and enrolling children in ethnic or religious schools (Knafo, 2003). Knafo
found that there were fewer parent–child discussions of values when children attended high-fit institutions, indicating that the strategy of cocooning may obviate the need for direct parental instruction.

*Guided Participation* is a less restrictive enculturation strategy that involves providing opportunities for children to participate in selected cultural activities such as celebration of traditional meals, holidays, dance, and music so that they can be voluntarily integrated into the children’s life preferences. For example, Jamaican Canadian parents strongly encouraged their children to participate in cultural festivals, extracurricular heritage schools, church, Jamaican music concerts, or joining Jamaican Canadian youth associations to communicate various cultural values and practices (Navara & Lollis, 2009).

Immigrant parents are not single minded in their transmission of cultural values. Parents may wish to encourage children’s development and expression of autonomy in the new culture by limiting their control as a way of achieving a higher goal of preserving their relationships with children. Therefore, compromise and receptivity to the child’s views (Padilla-Walker & Thompson, 2005) may not be a sign of failed parental control but a conscious strategy of balancing goals for cultural transmission with goals for a satisfactory continuing relationship with their children.

**Children’s Internalization and Externalization**

**Internalization Strategies**

As described earlier, children construct their working models of internalization by interpreting and evaluating parental values along with other alternatives available to them. In the case of acculturation, children approach the problem of integrating working models of culture from a different standpoint than their parents because they adapt more quickly and are more oriented to the new culture as the context for their future lives. The presence of such “acculturation gaps” depends on the specific content of ideas that are assessed. For example, studies have found that Asian children in the United States (Xiong, Detzner, & Cleveland, 2004) and Canada (Costigan & Dokis, 2006) maintained and valued a shared ethnic heritage with their immigrant parents and showed broad acceptance of collectivistic ideas of family centeredness, respect, responsibility, and high achievement, as well as ethnic identity. Moreover, children fair better when they maintain strong orientations toward traditional family values as well as their ethnic community (Zhou, 1997).

However, children may reject or confront specific values promoted by their parents that are contrary to what they may perceive to be desirable alternatives in the host culture (Kwak, 2003). Areas of parent–child conflict that have been found to be exacerbated by acculturation include personal autonomy, norms for power relations in the family, communication, and expression of intimacy in parent–child relationships (Kuczynski, Navara, & Boiger, 2011). Conflict over personal freedom and autonomy and resentment over perceived overprotectiveness and constraint is a frequent finding in the acculturation literature (Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Kwak and Berry, 2001; Xiong et al., 2004). However conflict over autonomy may have a gendered dimension that pertains to the moral concept
of fairness and justice. Traditional female sex roles vary from differential expectations of obedience and freedom between males and females (Tang & Dion, 1999) to relatively severe forms of discrimination in some cultures that emphasize male supremacy and female subordination and impose seclusion on the lives of daughters (Dhruvarajan, 1993; Turiel, 2002). Talbani and Hasanali (2000) showed that in South Asia and among South Asian immigrants, gender roles were maintained through gender segregation, control over social activities of girls, arranged marriage, and severe consequences for protest and dissent. Generational discrepancy between self and perceived parental values was found for Chinese women in Canada but not for men in the study by Tang and Dion (1999), suggesting greater conflict with regard to traditional gender role and cultural values for women. Such conflict may ensue when females face the contradiction between parental values and the more desirable norms of host cultures that promote gender equality.

Another area of value discrepancy that has received little research concerns values regarding exclusion versus tolerance of diversity. All cultures have experienced histories of religious or political strife and may include ideas and attitudes endorsing racial, ethnic, national, and religious intolerance, exclusion, and inequality as part of their heritage (Kuczynski & Navara, 2006). Such values may be contested in countries with multicultural policies that officially promote mutual harmony, tolerance, and cooperation among cultures. Children may take a moral stance when evaluating the fairness of such attitudes in parents (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002).

Children who are immersed in the contrasting norms and practices experienced in family life and those of the host culture are faced with choices and quandaries with regard to their allegiances to their parents and to the culture in which they live. Thus, like parents, children may also experience considerable ambivalence when they evaluate the costs and benefits of two sets of cultural values. They may reject or adapt the sometimes ill-fitting values of their parents while at the same time seeking to preserve a valued relationship with them. Recent research by Daniel et al. (2012) indicates that immigrant adolescents, who need to deal with multiple cultural influences on their values, have more complex value systems, in that they view values as differentially important depending on whether they are considering the family context or the school context.

A study of Vietnamese adolescents in Canada (Boiger, Kuczynski, Le, & Osland, 2008) found that most adolescents could easily produce lists of detailed parental expectations, many of which were identified as having a cultural origin. Vietnamese adolescents spontaneously provided both positive and negative evaluations of the ideas and actions of their parents, but the majority of their assessments of their parents’ values were ambivalent. Ambivalence took various forms—for example, disapproving of parents’ ideas while acknowledging parents’ good intentions, feeling love for parents yet finding it impossible to follow their expectations, or approving of the parents’ goals but not their socialization strategies. In contrast to straightforward rejection of parental values, ambivalence may allow adolescents space to reconcile and integrate these motives. It may lead children to generate novel complex integrations of cultural ideas and values in their personal working models so as to achieve goals of autonomy coexisting with family interdependence. Consequently, although stressful in the short term, these tensions may not be ultimately detrimental, but act as a catalyst for adaptive change.

A developmental perspective on the process in which adolescents negotiate conflicting value messages can be enlightening. Early adolescents show lower value complexity
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(when thinking of their values in the context of their cultural group, family, and school) than older adolescents (Daniel et al., 2012). Although both early adolescents and older adolescents show a negative relationship between value complexity and well-being, this relationship is weaker for older adolescents (Daniel, Boehnke, & Knafo, submitted). Taken together, these two findings indicate that while the need to entertain different values across contexts may be especially stressful in early adolescence, older adolescents learn to tolerate it and are increasingly able to entertain inconsistencies in their value system.

Strategies for Managing Parents

An important part of the externalization process for children concerns the choices that children make in resolving potential contradictions between their own working models and the demands and challenges of their parents. Children must decide whether to accept or challenge their parents’ interpretations of situations or to protect their own interpretations in other ways.

Children may attempt to manage parental attempts at control and influence so as not to be determined by their parents’ goals. Parkin & Kuczynski (2012) described overt and covert resistance strategies used by adolescents to deal with conflicting expectations. The most common overt strategies were arguing with parents, ignoring them, or attempting to find a middle ground through negotiation. However, the use of covert resistance and cognitive resistance enabled adolescents to pursue their own goals while avoiding conflict. For instance, adolescents engaged in forbidden behaviors out of the parent’s sight, or complied behaviorally while privately rejecting the parent’s message.

In the study by Boiger and colleagues (2008), three parent management strategies for dealing with conflicting expectations were identified: resistance, negotiation or communication, and accommodation. Resistance strategies included a range of behaviors that demonstrated little regard for the parents’ perspective. The most common strategies in this category were convincing parents, using a “take it or leave it” or “fait accompli” stance, hiding actions from parents, and reacting emotionally or throwing tantrums. Negotiation or communication strategies emphasized compromise and communication and indicated a concern for reconciling both points of view in a conflict. Avoidance strategies included conflict evasion as well as resistant compliance where adolescents complied behaviorally without accepting the parents’ views. It was evident that adolescents attempted to achieve two simultaneous goals in their strategic interactions with parents. Although they wished to exercise autonomy over their choices, they also wished to preserve their relationships with their parents. Adolescent use of partial disclosure to manage parental knowledge about their behavior have also been reported among acculturated Chinese, Mexican, and European youth (Tasopoulos-Chan, Smetana, & Yau, 2009).

Research on children as cultural brokers (Parke & Buriel, 1998) suggests that children may also play a significant role in forming and managing their parents’ working models of culture. Immigrant children are often placed in the position of being the public face of the family in a variety of situations such as relating with financial institutions, doctors, and government officials (Buriel & DeMent, 1997). Because of their greater expertise in the host culture, children may become translators of the new language and interpreters of the culture for their parents and thereby play a role in the resocialization of their parents.
in the norms of the new culture. Studies of Mexican American and Chinese American families suggest that brokering is often carried out by female children and may begin in elementary school when children are preadolescents (Buriel & DeMent, 1997; Chao, 2001). The brokering process involves a balance on the part of the child. Although there is an apparent role reversal in that children sometimes “teach” parents things about the new culture, ideally they must still maintain deference and respect consistent with their status as children (Parke et al., 2003).

Conclusions and Implications

It has long been understood that children influence parenting practices as they impact children’s development. However, the idea that children may have a more comprehensive impact that includes input into the parents’ continuing adult development and internalization is just beginning to be explored. A more comprehensive view of family processes that includes an emphasis on parents and children as agents in the context of their relationships opens additional avenues of research. Cognitive developmental research has led the way in exploring children’s constructive processes in internalization. However, this has not been matched with a balanced interest in parents’ constructive processes in their own continuing adult development of values. For instance, how do parents think about their socialization experiences, and how do they select which values to pass on, abandon, or modify when they come to socialize their own children? Research has added detail to children’s interpretive actions and behavioral resistance to their parent’s socialization efforts; however, more research is required on the process of accommodating their agency and autonomy within the contexts of the family relationships and culture to which they are embedded and remain loyal. Another expansion in the idea of socialization comes from examining the link between micro social processes in the family and macro social forces such as generational and cultural change. This requires a more complex and dynamic view of constructs such as values, culture, and generation. A dialectical view of bidirectional causality provides a foundation for linking the two levels of analyses. Parents and children form personal working models of values and culture through engagement in the contradictions afforded by the ecological contexts and relationship contexts in which they are embedded.

References


Innovation and Continuity in Socialization, Internalization, and Acculturation


This chapter describes how socialization experiences affect the development of morality—specifically, moral behavior and the cognitions and affect that accompany that behavior. It surveys the evolution of ideas about socialization and morality, ending with a discussion of how different socialization experiences impact moral values. By “socialization,” we mean the process by which new members of a group are assisted by more experienced others to adopt the values, standards, and behaviors of that group (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). The word “assist” is important because socialization does not involve the transmission, or simply passing on, of values. The process is bidirectional, with children taking an active part, co-constructing with agents of socialization a set of guidelines for moral behavior. Indeed, in a transactional model of socialization children are seen to wield their considerable power to alter the values of socializing agents (e.g., Kuczynski, 2003), as well as to resist efforts to change their own values.

Because socialization occurs whenever an individual seeks to become part of a new group, it can occur at any point during the lifespan. This chapter is about the socialization of young children to become functioning members of the cultural group to which they belong, presumably because that is the major context in which most moral values are acquired. Much of the research that will be discussed pertains to socialization by parents (particularly mothers), although peers, siblings, teachers, and the media are also sources of influence. We note that socialization occurs with respect to a great many different values, not just moral ones. Thus, children learn to study hard at school, eat with the appropriate utensils, avoid dangerous situations, and not harm others. Although most early socialization theorists did not differentiate among different kinds of values, it soon became evident that some are more easily acquired than others (Bugental & Grusec, 2006). In this chapter we talk about moral values, which we define as those involving helping or not harming other people. We include prosocial behavior as well, that is, helpful and caring actions, given that omission of these acts can be harmful to others. We talk about the behavioral, affective, and cognitive outcomes with respect to value socialization. Emphasis is placed on internalization, or behaving morally not through fear of external consequences, but because such behavior is perceived to be inherently correct, or chosen by the self.
In what follows we will trace how ideas about the socialization of morality have changed over time and in response to accumulating research evidence. Changes include modification of views of (a) children taking over or incorporating the values of agents of socialization to one in which they are seen be selective in what they adopt or accept, (b) all children responding in the same way to given socialization strategies to one in which the characteristics of individual children are seen to affect their construals or perceptions of those strategies and hence the way in which they react to them, and (c) of most socialization occurring in a situation where children have violated a moral principle or value to a realization the socialization goes on in a variety of different situations that require different kinds of parenting strategies and have different sorts of outcomes.

Foundations and Theoretical Background

Identification

The history of socialization theory is an impressively long one, beginning with psychoanalytic theory. It was in Freud’s conceptualization of the development of conscience that the importance of taking over, incorporating, or internalizing values first came to be discussed, thereby setting the stage for subsequent thinking about moral development. According to psychoanalytic perspectives (see Hoffman, 1970, for a review), children repress the feelings of hostility elicited by parental control or prohibition because they fear the loss of love or abandonment that might be elicited by the expression of those feelings. Feelings of hostility are therefore turned inward where they take the form of guilt, with avoidance of guilt possible only by conforming to parental prohibitions. Parental prohibitions, then, are adopted in their entirety and form the basis of conscience or the inner voice that dictates the difference between right and wrong along with the negative feelings accompanying that knowledge. In this way children identify with the values of their parents.

Psychoanalytic ideas were translated into learning theory terms by academic psychologists in the middle of the last century (e.g., Sears, Whiting, Nowlis, & Sears, 1953). These theorists offered an explanation for why children identify with their parents in the form of a secondary drive whose goal is to act like the caregiver. Thus children take over, or internalize, the values of their parents, moving from a situation of being externally controlled to one of self- or internal control. Successful socialization, then, required compliance not because of obvious external pressure but because of a form of inner control appearing to come from the taking over of parental standards as the child’s own. Again, the notion of self-regulation rather than external regulation became central.

Their conceptualization of the socialization process led these researchers to focus on optimal strategies for responding to children’s antisocial behavior: Praise, isolation, reasoning, and withdrawal of love were seen as more effective than the use of tangible rewards, deprivation of rewards, or physical punishment because the former, love-oriented approaches, required children to act like the parent in order to provide themselves with the reinforcement that had been withdrawn (Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957). Also emphasized was the quality of the mother–child relationship, with warm mothers more likely to elicit desirable behavior because their actions were more rewarding than those of mothers who were low in warmth.
Observational Learning

Bandura and Walters (1963) moved the acquisition of morality from the realm of parental control and discipline when they argued that learning principles involving reinforcement and punishment were too narrow to encompass the richness of human social interaction. They emphasized, instead, the centrality of observational learning whereby the behaviors of others are reproduced even in the absence of any form of reinforcement. In essence, then, Bandura and Walters did away with the Freudian notion of identification and with the need for an identification drive, replacing it with an innate propensity to learn and to model the actions of others.

Bandura and his colleagues published many studies demonstrating the importance of observational learning in moral development (e.g., Bandura & Huston, 1961; Bandura, Grusec, & Menlove, 1966; Bandura & Mischel, 1965; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1965; Walters & Parke, 1964). They focused on inhibition of aggression, self-regulation, resistance to temptation, and delay of gratification—what they considered to be the essence of morality or conscience, demonstrating that models not only teach novel responses but also change the probability that previously learned behaviors will occur. Bandura dealt with the shift from external to internal control by suggesting that children observe and adopt the self-evaluative standards they see others adopt for themselves, thereby developing control over their own behavior and no longer requiring the intervention of socializing agents. However, Bandura (e.g., 1977) was also at pains to point out that standards of behavior are not passively absorbed (the “social mold” model of identification theorists) but that children select from the often conflicting information they receive before they can generate rules or standards of behavior. This selection depends on a wide variety of factors including differences in perceived competence between the model and the self, the value placed on a particular activity, and the degree to which behavior is seen as arising from one’s own effort and ability rather than being a function of external factors over which one has little control.

Cognitive Developmental Perspectives

Martin Hoffman (1970) concluded that there was ample evidence indicating direct observation of a deviant model to have a disinhibiting effect on the observer but none that it affected the child’s level of self-control beyond the baseline in existence before exposure to the model. Thus, Hoffman concluded that modeled behavior was essentially a reflection of external morality in which motives are hedonistic. He returned, therefore, to the earlier consideration of parental discipline strategies and their role in the internalization of positive moral actions. The move from external to internal control, he suggested, was particularly effectively accomplished when parents used reasoning, particularly reasoning that pointed out the negative consequences of the child’s antisocial behavior for others. This form of reasoning sets the stage for existential guilt, which is more likely to promote efforts at reparation and future consideration of the welfare of others than the sort of anxiety and personal guilt arising from love withdrawal. In a survey of existing research Hoffman (1970, Table 3) found modest support for a negative relation between power assertive discipline techniques (withdrawal of privileges and material rewards and physical punishment) and internalization and a positive one between induction and internalization (both
of which held for mothers but not for fathers), and no clear relation between withdrawal of love and internalization. He also noted some support for a relation between maternal affection and internalization. Hoffman concluded that all discipline interventions include components of power assertion, love withdrawal, and reasoning, with modest levels of power assertion providing the motivation to behave (and/or catching the attention of the child) and reasoning providing the morally relevant cognitive structure.

**Attributional Perspectives**

A focus on discipline techniques in the form of reasoning and power assertion continued to characterize socialization theory and research for many years. Attribution theorists contributed to thinking about socialization by providing a mechanism for the differential effectiveness of these two approaches in promoting internalization of moral and other behavioral standards. In an early study, Freedman (1965) had demonstrated that children who were punished mildly for playing with particular toys were more likely to refrain from playing with them at a later time when they were alone and believed themselves to be unobserved (the significant feature of internalization) than were children who had been severely punished. Lepper (1983) employed the minimal sufficiency principle (Nisbett & Valins, 1971) to account for this finding. He began with the premise of attribution theory that people look for reasons or explanations for their behavior. When there is an obvious explanation (for example, fear of punishment), they attribute their actions to external pressure and, when that external pressure is no longer present, they can therefore behave as they wish. When there is no obvious explanation—for example, there was only minimal pressure for them to engage in the action in question (the kind of minimal pressure provided by reasoning and very modest amounts of power assertion)—they seek the reason in their own beliefs and intrinsic motivation. Extrapolating to issues of internalization, the optimal strategy for the socialization of moral and other values would be to provide conditions under which children were induced to comply with the minimum of pressure—just sufficient to obtain compliance—and would therefore have to attribute their compliance to an internalized value system. When there was overly sufficient justification for compliance, attributions to external causality would be more likely, and the behavior would not be internalized. Here, then, was another explanation, beyond those provided by Hoffman (1970), for the superiority of reasoning over power assertion.

A number of studies fit with an attributional analysis of socialization. For example, Grusec and Redler (1980) provided noncoercive prompts to children to share their winnings from a game with others and then interpreted their behavior when they shared by telling them either that they must have done so because they were nice people who liked to help others whenever possible or because it was a nice thing to do. The latter was intended to provide a more external justification for prosocial behavior because it involved social reinforcement for sharing, whereas attributions to internal motivation were deemed to be more likely to promote internalization. In keeping with expectation, children provided with an explanation that involved internal motives were subsequently more prosocial in a variety of situations than those whose actions had been followed with more external consequences in the form of social reinforcement.
Parenting Styles

Concurrent with socialization theories that focused on discipline strategies and on modeling was the very influential work of Baumrind on styles of parenting (e.g., Baumrind, 1971; Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010). Baumrind distinguished between two types of parental control, that which is firmly controlling but sensitive to the child’s needs and wishes and that which is harshly and unbendingly controlling. The former—the authoritative approach—is associated with better socioemotional development, whereas the latter—the authoritarian approach—is associated with negative child outcomes. There is a great deal of commonality between styles of parenting and parenting discipline strategies, and so these two different but overlapping approaches could coexist quite nicely.

Current Research and Thinking

Evolving views of the socialization process appeared to produce a coherent picture of effective socialization processes. Thus, agents of socialization who reasoned, who modeled appropriate behavior, who exerted only minimal amounts of pressure for compliance, and who responded to the needs of the child would be successful. Added to this collection of attributes was that of the parent–child relationship: Parents who were warm and sensitively responsive to their children were also more likely to be successful in producing compliant and morally capable children. In addition to the focus on parenting actions, investigators also acknowledged that socialization was a two-way process, with children eliciting reactions from their parents (Bell, 1968) as well as being selective in what they chose to accept of the parents’ teachings (Bandura, 1977). Sameroff (1975) noted that there are continuous reciprocal interchanges between parents and children and that socializing relationships therefore undergo constant transformation. Nevertheless, research still tended to employ a unidirectional model of socialization (Kuczynski, 2003). In the present discussion of current research and thinking, we consider two issues that are relevant to socialization as a bidirectional process. The first is that there are individual differences in how children respond to particular socialization practices and that socialization strategies must be modified accordingly. The second is that socialization occurs in a variety of contexts and must therefore be appropriate to the context in which it is taking place.

Focusing on the Child’s Perspective

A number of developments indicated that the picture of socialization as involving the use of certain discipline techniques and a certain style of parenting was an overly simplified one. For example, the evidence was inconsistent, with the relation between reasoning and moral behavior seeming to hold for mothers but not fathers (Brody & Flor, 1997). Moreover, the relation held for inhibited or fearful children but not for fearless ones (Kochanska, 1997). In addition, mothers were observed to use different discipline techniques depending on the nature of the child’s misdeeds. As an example of the latter, Grusec, Dix, and Mills (1982) found that mothers reacted to antisocial acts with a combination of reasoning and power assertion and to failures to show concern for others with reasoning.
Socialization as Accurate Perception and Acceptance of the Message

In light of these contradictions, Grusec and Goodnow (1994) argued that socialization should be reconceptualized from a focus on strategies to one on the clarity of the message being delivered and the extent to which it was accepted by the child. Thus, values would be most easily acquired if the one being taught were accurately perceived by the child and then accepted. With respect to accurate perception, redundancy and consistency promote clarity, as do the fit to the child’s level of cognitive sophistication. And power assertion or dramatic presentation could draw attention to the message as well as indicate that the desired behavior was important to the socializing agent. Acceptance, on the other hand, would be determined by the extent to which parenting behavior was perceived by the child as appropriate and fair, the extent of the child’s level of motivation to comply with parental wishes, and the degree to which behavior was perceived to be self-generated rather than externally imposed. In support of this model, Knafo and Schwartz (2003) found a number of variables to be positively related to accurate perception of parents’ values, including the degree of warmth and responsiveness parents displayed and the extent to which parents agreed with each other about the importance of a value. Parental conflict over values and indifferent and autocratic parenting were negatively correlated with accurate perception and, with the exception of father–son dyads, withdrawal of love and consistency in parental value messages over time were positively related to accuracy. Knafo and Schwartz suggest that affectionate parenting increases the motivation of children to listen more closely to the values their parents espouse, and that consistency makes messages more understandable.

Socialization and Meaning

Grusec and Goodnow (1994) also argued that more attention should be paid to the interpretation children made of a given socialization event. And research in the last several years has made it very clear that the child’s perspective is indeed an important component of socialization effectiveness. Thus, the meaning that is attached to a particular parenting strategy is often more important than the strategy itself. Indeed, Grusec, Goodnow, and Kuczynski (2000) argued that effective socialization involves appraisal and flexible action in the face of constantly changing features of children and situations. Successful socialization, then, involves knowledge of the meaning a particular child attaches to a given action and the use of that knowledge by the parent or other agent of socialization to act in ways that will be perceived as fair, reasonable, and motivating.

Several features of the socialization situation are important in determining the meaning that is attached to socialization strategies. They include the context in which actions are delivered, the age of the child, the sex of the child, and the sex of the parent. Thus, adolescents whose mothers exert high levels of control have lower levels of delinquency when they are securely attached but not when they are insecurely attached (Allen, Moore, Kuperminc, & Bell, 1998). When the content of a message conflicts with the tone of voice in which it is delivered, the former carries more weight for younger than for older children (Morton & Trehub, 2001). And, in a meta-analysis, Rothbaum and Weisz (1994) found that associations between power assertive parenting behavior and externalizing problems were greater for older children and adolescents than for toddlers and preschoolers: One reason for this may
be that punitive parenting is seen as less fair and acceptable as children grow older. Boys react more negatively to parental pressure than girls (Rothbaum & Weisz, 1994). Psychologically controlling parenting by fathers increases relational aggression more among girls than among boys (Kawabata, Alink, Tseng, van Ijzendoorn, & Crick, 2011). And fathers tend to be more power assertive and direct in their approach to childrearing (Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988), which may account for children’s perception of physical punishment as more acceptable when administered by fathers than by mothers (Dadds, Sheffield, & Holbeck, 1990). Two other moderators of the impact of parenting strategies on children’s moral development are temperament and culture, and we now consider each of these in more detail.

Temperament

There has been an explosion of studies in the last few years demonstrating interactions between parenting strategies and children’s temperament, that is, biologically based, early appearing, and relatively stable differences in response to emotionally salient stimuli and in self-regulation of those responses. Pioneering work was conducted by Kochanska (e.g., Kockanska, 1997) in which she reported, as noted above, that fearful, inhibited children showed reduced levels of conscience development when their parents used power assertive discipline relative to less harsh forms. There was no relation between type of discipline and conscience development for uninhibited or fearless children: For them, security of attachment was the predictor of conscience levels.

So-called difficult temperament, which involves irritability and negative reactions to overstimulation and frustration, is another feature of children’s emotional reactions that has been shown to moderate the effects of parenting on moral behavior. Thus, children with a difficult temperament display externalizing problems when they experience hostile and insensitive parenting, whereas those with an easy temperament do not (e.g., Morris, et al., 2002; Stice & Gonzales, 1998; Wills, Sandy, Yaeger, & Shinar, 2001). It has been suggested that difficult children are more easily involved in coercive interactions with ineffectually controlling parents and that this results in continuing problems with antisocial behavior. A third feature of temperament is self-regulation, that is, low levels of impulsivity and resistance to control along with high levels of effortful control. Children with lower levels of self-regulation or effortful control are more likely to develop antisocial behavior when the parenting they receive is hostile and cold than are children who are high in effortful control (e.g., Morris et al., 2002). All this work, in addition to demonstrating the complexities of socialization processes, suggests that children perceive events differently as a function of their temperamental predispositions and that knowledge of those perceptions should help to guide socialization agents to effective interventions.

Most research on temperament by parenting interactions has been directed by the belief that children with problematic temperaments are more likely to be adversely impacted by negative parenting compared to those with less problematic temperaments. Recently, however, it has been argued that these children are also more likely to be unusually positively impacted by good or excellent parenting (Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Boyce & Ellis, 2005). Belsky and Pluess cite such indications from an array of studies. For example, Kochanska, Aksan, and Joy (2007) found that fearful toddlers whose mothers used limited amounts of power assertion, relative to toddlers who were fearless, appeared to display a higher moral sense (in this
case, self-report on several moral dimensions including guilt after deviation and compliance without surveillance). Bradley and Corwyn (2008) reported that better parenting predicted fewer externalizing problems and poorer parenting more externalizing problems, with the effect stronger for difficult children than for children with an easy temperament. Differential susceptibility to environmental experiences has also been demonstrated when genetic markers have been used as moderators. Again, there is evidence of differential susceptibility, with individuals who carry one set of genes more likely to engage in antisocial behavior when exposed to poor parenting and less likely to engage in it when exposed to good parenting, relative to those individuals with a different set of genes. These differences in plasticity, with some individuals particularly sensitive to environmental variation and others relatively unaffected by it, are seen to be adaptive from an evolutionary perspective (Belsky & Pluess, 2009).

Culture

The cultural context (social class or country of origin) in which socialization occurs is also important in determining the meaning a child attaches to socialization strategies: Parenting strategies reflect cultural beliefs and values and thereby take on different characteristics as a function of those beliefs and values. In many cultures, for example, parenting tends to be more authoritarian than in Anglo-European contexts, but it appears less harmful relative to the same kind of parenting in the Anglo-European context (Hill & Witherupsern, 2011). In a culture where authoritarian parenting emphasizes the importance of obedience and self-discipline, it has a more benign meaning than it does in an individualist context where it frequently is associated with anger and rejection (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). If a practice is seen to be the result of love and caring, then it takes on a different meaning than if it is a sign of anger and rejection.

Another variable that has been assumed to affect the child’s perception is the normativeness of an intervention, which, of course, varies from culture to culture (as well as within cultures). Lansford et al. (2005), for example, asked mothers and children from six different countries—Thailand, China, the Philippines, Italy, India, and Kenya—to rate the frequency of usage of corporal punishment by other parents. They found that corporal punishment was less strongly associated with children’s externalizing problems in countries where it was seen to be more normative. However, they also found evidence of harmful effects, with increased aggression and anxiety associated with the use of physical discipline in all countries. In a later study, Lansford et al. (2010) assessed the impact of physical, as well as harsh verbal, discipline on children’s anxiety and aggression. Using data from four different countries they found that harsh verbal discipline was more harmful when it was considered less normative. Additionally, they found that links between physical and harsh verbal discipline and negative outcomes were mediated by children’s perceptions of parental rejection and hostility. Thus, when discipline is a marker for parental negativity, it is harmful, but when it is a marker for parental caring, it is less so.

Domains of Socialization

Another direction in which socialization theory has moved involves the identification of different forms of social relationships and the resulting implications of those different
forms for socialization. Early work on the variety of social relationships that have evolved in human society was carried out by Fiske (1992). On the basis of theoretical and ethnographic work, he identified four types of social relationships: communal sharing where all members of the group are seen as equivalent and having equal access to resources and benefits; authority ranking where group members are ordered hierarchically; equality matching where benefits are exchanged and imbalances are tracked; and market pricing where interactions are situated in values determined by a market system. Moving from this work, Bugental and others (Bugental, 2000; Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Bugental & Grusec, 2006; Grusec & Davidov, 2010) have identified different forms of relationships involved in the socialization process. They argue that socialization should be considered as happening in different domains, with each domain characterized by a particular relationship between the agent of socialization and the new group member. Most importantly, the domain approach suggests that different socialization practices are required depending on the domain in which interactions take place. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, the mechanisms underlying moral socialization in different domains may be rather different.

Bugental (2000) identified four domains of relationships that provide a context for socialization. They are: attachment relationships where caregivers protect the child in times of stress and danger, reciprocal relationships where there is a mutual exchange of benefits and positive affect, hierarchical relationships where caregivers use their greater control of resources to facilitate compliance and discourage disobedience, and social identity relationships where identity is shared with members of the in-group and its norms and routines thereby acquired. She then went on to show how each domain differed in its evolutionary underpinnings, developmental course, rules of social interaction, regulatory mechanisms including associated neurohormonal processes, type of social information sought, and nature of the socialization tasks involved.

In an elaboration of the socialization tasks involved, Grusec and Davidov (2010) modified some of Bugental’s labeling, as well as introduced a fifth form of relationship. Accordingly, they discussed the domains of protection, mutual reciprocity, control, and group participation, and a new domain, guided learning. They characterized the latter as involving a teaching relationship, with one member the guide or mentor and the other the student. The protection domain, of course, has been thoroughly explored by attachment theorists. The notion of mutual reciprocity was first introduced by Maccoby and Martin (1983) as an additional means of socialization beyond those involving discipline and control, which characterized so much of the socialization literature. When parents and their children are involved in this relationship, they share common goals and happily exchange favors. The group participation domain encompasses observational learning and participation in routines and rituals, and the guided learning domain includes communication and discussion about socialization issues that occur independent of the child’s behavior, that is, outside the discipline situation. We discuss each of these domains in terms of the kinds of interactions and tasks involved and their links to moral development.

**Control Domain**

We begin with the control domain, given that it has been the object of most research and theoretical attention. Although, as discussed throughout this chapter, moral development
can be achieved through appropriate use of gentle discipline, the context of child mis-
behavior and parental need for behavior change can create problems fairly easily. Parents
in the discipline situation frequently are focused on outcomes other than the teaching of
values, often being more intent, for example, on achieving short-term goals of compli-
ance or relationship maintenance rather than the long-term goal of value internalization
(Hastings & Grusec, 1998). Moreover, when parent and child are in conflict, negative af-
fective states are increased in both members of the dyad, which can be detrimental to the
learning process. During conflict and the frustration of their wishes, children’s cognitive
resources are occupied with regulating emotion so that they are less focused on the lesson
to be learned (Thompson, 1990), and parents are also more concerned with managing
children’s negative emotions (as well as their own), at the expense of teaching the value
(Laible & Panfile, 2009). In spite of these limitations, the use of mild punishment, often as
an attention-getting device, paired with rule setting, enforcement, and appropriate expla-
nation, appears to be effective for moral development.

Recent studies relevant to the control domain have focused on the socialization of
moral emotions and continue to support the idea (keeping in mind the many moderators
operating) that minimal use of power assertion accompanied by reasoning facilitates moral
development. Laible, Eye, and Carlo (2008), for example, found that the moral emotions
of guilt, shame, sympathy, and empathy were positively associated with parents’ use of
induction and reasoning, whereas they were negatively associated with power assertive
discipline (e.g., using forceful commands or control over privileges and resources). Laible
et al. suggest that power assertive discipline may be too arousing and cause too much per-
sonal distress to allow for the development of other-oriented emotions such as guilt and
empathy that precipitate moral behavior.

Fathers vs. Mothers

Research involving fathers and discipline continues to be relatively rare, although some of
the studies described earlier in this chapter seem to suggest a different pattern for moth-
ers and fathers in discipline interactions. In a recent study, Volling, Mahoney, and Rauer
(2009) found that fathers used more punitive disciplinary strategies and fewer induction
techniques than mothers. When asked how they would respond to hypothetical parenting
scenarios, fathers were more likely than mothers to report love withdrawal, disgust, teasing,
physical power assertion, and to focus on negative aspects of the child. Fathers were also
less likely than mothers to teach reparation, victim-focused induction, and to focus on
negative aspects of the behavior (rather than on the child). Importantly, when both moth-
ers and fathers used induction techniques, children were reported to have higher levels of
confession and reparation after misdeeds, internalized conduct, and concern about other’s
wrongdoing.

Boys vs. Girls

Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, and Alisat (2003) investigated adolescents’ development of a
moral self ideal, that is, a belief in the importance of moral values to the self as well as
internalization of moral personality traits. They found that for males, but not for females,
parental strictness predicted the importance adolescents ascribed to moral personality traits 2 years later. This sex difference mirrors earlier findings by Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, and Skinner (1991) that low levels of parental monitoring and of strictness relate to higher levels of antisocial behavior, again particularly for males. To be noted, of course, is that although appropriate levels of monitoring and strictness can promote moral development, when parental control becomes intrusive and coercive, negative consequences are likely to result, including antisocial and delinquent behavior (Kerr & Stattin, 2000).

**Conclusion**

In sum, then, the large body of research on discipline in relation to moral development continues to suggest that, averaged over a wide variety of situations, parental control techniques providing a sense of choice to children and adolescents are effective in promoting the internalization of positive social behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985); however, it seems that a particularly valuable part of these interactions may be the reasoning, induction, and teaching that parents provide. Thus, we suggest that parenting in the guided learning domain, which involves supportive teaching and guiding of children’s moral understanding, may be where the explicit transmission of moral values is more likely to lead to internalization. We turn next, therefore, to this domain.

**Guided Learning Domain**

In the domain of guided learning the parent–child relationship is one of teacher and student. The best learning occurs when the task is taught within the child’s zone of proximal development, able to be mastered with the aid of a more experienced other (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning must be supported or scaffolded with adjustments according to the child’s changing skill level and understanding, with teacher involvement gradually reduced as the child becomes more expert. Most research on guided learning has addressed its role in cognitive development. It is becoming increasingly evident, however, that the socialization of moral development can also be understood within this context. Indeed, given emphasis in the control domain on the importance of reasoning and induction in the development of appropriate behavior, it is evident that something akin to guided learning may well be occurring in discipline encounters, albeit with an overlay of expressed disapproval. In the case of guided learning it is this overlay that is absent.

Socialization agents encourage moral development in this domain by providing opportunities for children to engage in cognitively stimulating interactions that provide a context for growth (Walker, Hennig, & Krettenauer, 2000). Through these interactions, they may be able to provide guidance and advice that supports and scaffolds children’s understanding of moral and character issues (Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Turner & Berkowitz, 2005; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Walker and Taylor (1991), for example, found that parents’ use of a representational style (including asking children’s opinions and checking for understanding), as well as their use of a supportive style (including the encouragement of participation in discussion), predicted their children’s ability to reason about moral issues. This type of autonomy-supportive style has been promoted by social determination theorists as critical for value internalization (e.g., Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997) and
may well facilitate moral value internalization in addition to growth in moral reasoning. Through these autonomy-supportive interactions, parents are able to guide their children by reflecting the children’s own thoughts back to them, thereby facilitating reformulations in their thinking (Buzzelli, 1993). This process of reflection results in the integration of values with previous knowledge and value structures necessary for truly internalized motivations and values (Grolnick et al., 1997).

In a similar sense, from a Vygotskian perspective, children’s moral understanding is constructed and guided through social processes. When adults interpret and frame moral rules and events during dialogues with children, they influence the moral understanding that develops and the moral constructions that children will eventually internalize to regulate behavior (Buzzelli, 1993). In this way, conversations and discussions can be seen to be of paramount importance to moral development, as it is these communication interactions that eventually become internalized as “inner speech,” marking the internalization of adult or societal norms and thereby allowing for self-regulated responses based on self-constructed rules (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981).

Parents vs. Peers

Although interactions and discussions with parents are critical to moral socialization, peers also become increasingly influential interaction partners as social networks expand during childhood and adolescence. Due to the egalitarian nature of peer relationships, the expression of conflict may be perceived differently than in parent–child interactions, perhaps explaining the finding that an interfering style of interaction when discussing moral conflicts with peers is associated with rapid growth in moral development, while this same style used by parents produces little moral growth (Walker et al., 2000).

Guided Learning vs. Control

More evidence for the importance of discussion and conversation in the internalization of values comes from a recent study by Vinik, Johnston, Farrell, and Grusec (in press). They asked first-year undergraduates to describe a time when they had learned an important moral value or lesson, including a description of the event that precipitated the learning, the agent of socialization, and the context in which the value was learned. Additionally, the young adults were asked to say how much the event still influenced their current thoughts and feelings, with this report taken as an index of internalization. Vinik et al. found that values that were learned in the control domain were significantly less likely to be reported as influencing current thoughts and feelings, that is, as internalized, than were those learned through discussion and conversations, that is, in the guided learning domain.

Conclusion

In sum, socialization within the guided learning domain provides an effective and explicit means to moral value internalization with discussions and conversations first occurring in a social context and then becoming an internalized dialogue that influences thoughts and behaviors in moral contexts. Central to this analysis is the fact that attention to the child’s
current level of knowledge and scaffolding of new knowledge ensures that children have a deep understanding, arrived at on their own, of a particular value or principle.

**Group Participation Domain**

In the group participation domain, of which observational learning is one aspect, parent and child act as joint members of the same social group, with the parent facilitating the child’s observation of and participation in the practices of the group. This domain is also highly relevant to children’s interactions with their peers who also serve as models of behavior. The question here is whether modeling is effective in promoting internalized moral values or whether behavior that results from observation is more externally driven. Earlier we noted Hoffman’s (1970) conclusion that research evidence clearly indicated direct observation of a deviant model to have a disinhibiting effect on the observer, but that it was less clear that exposure to models who displayed inhibition or self-denial or who were punished for antisocial actions actually increased the observer’s level of self-control beyond what it was initially. Accordingly, Hoffman concluded that modeled behavior was driven by hedonistic motives and that it really was a reflection of external rather than internalized morality.

Much of the research on modeling has dealt with prosocial behavior, that is, helping, sharing, and comforting. Indeed, Vinik et al. (in press) found that the learning of prosocial values was much more likely to be reported in the group participation domain than was the learning of values involving the inhibition of antisocial conduct. (With respect to internalization, values learned in the group participation domain were not rated significantly different in their impact than those learned in either the control or guided learning domains.)

In total, the research certainly seems to indicate that parents who are caring are more likely to have children who display the same virtues. Thus, parents who model the prosocial act of volunteering (e.g., in the child’s school, places of worship, and in the community) are more likely than uninvolved parents to have adolescents who are also volunteers (Keith, Nelson, Schlabach, & Thompson, 1990; Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000; Zaff, Malanchuk, Michelsen, & Eccles, 2003) and who sustain their involvement into early adulthood (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Zaff, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008). In retrospective accounts, adults and adolescents involved in volunteerism frequently report growing up in homes where they were aware that their parents volunteered (Omoto & Snyder, 2002; Hofer, 1999). One mechanism that has been proposed for this relation is the development of an altruistic self-image: Early adolescent girls who identify their parents as volunteers are more likely to report that helping is an important part of their identity than girls of parents who are not models of helping behavior (Stukas, Switzer, Dew, Goycoolea, & Simmons, 1999). Of course, it is also possible that the taking over of moral values does not occur solely from modeling; these parents may also have discussions with their children about the importance of helping others (thereby moving the interaction into the guided learning domain), and it is these conversations that would then facilitate their children’s prosocial behavior.

Research on the peer group offers additional evidence for the role of modeling in the development of prosocial behavior. For example, Wentzel, Barry, and Caldwell (2004)
found that children in the sixth grade with a close friend who was more prosocial showed increases in their own prosocial behavior over a 2-year period. However, modeling peer prosocial behavior may not lead to internalization of values because it may instead be a reflection of group pressure to conform.

Another feature of the group participation domain involves engagement in group routines and rituals. Adolescent involvement in family activities such as group outings, going to church, and playing games together is uniquely predictive of civic participation (Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1999). And early adolescents who perform routine, self-regulated household chores that benefit the entire family exhibit more spontaneous helping, sharing, comforting, defending, and demonstration of concern for others. Chores that only benefit the child (even though parents may care that they are done), such as keeping one’s room clean, are not related to prosocial behavior, and in middle childhood there is in fact a negative relation between “selfish” chores and children’s concern for others (Grusec, Goodnow, & Cohen, 1996).

Reciprocity Domain

Maccoby and Martin (1983) proposed that parental compliance with children’s reasonable needs, wishes, and requests elicits in turn the child’s compliance with parental requests, reflecting an inborn tendency to reciprocate the actions of others. And a number of studies have indeed demonstrated the existence of such reciprocal responding or compliance, including compliance in the absence of surveillance. In the reciprocity domain, then, parent and child are equal-status partners, involved in interactions characterized by mutuality and exchange, similar to the horizontal nature of typical peer and sibling play interactions. Here, the parent complies with the child’s requests (when reasonable), and the child’s innate tendency to reciprocate behavior is evoked. Compliance, then, occurs not because there is conflict that is settled in favor of the parent as in the control domain, but because child and parent share common goals.

In a longstanding program of research, Kochanska and her colleagues have consistently linked mutual responsivity (including mutually experienced positive emotion) in parent–child interactions to children’s willingness to comply with parental prohibitions in the absence of surveillance. In turn, this form of compliance has predicted conscience development, with the latter operationalized as commitment to rule-compatible conduct, even in the absence of external control (Kochanska, Aksan, & Koenig, 1995). Thus, committed compliance (e.g., resisting a forbidden toy in the absence of surveillance) at ages 2 to 4 longitudinally predicts prosocial behavior and regard for standards and rules of behavior at age 6 (Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim, & Yoon, 2010). Moreover, Kochanska et al. (2010) found that the relation between committed compliance and conscience was mediated by children’s views of themselves as moral individuals, a view they suggest emerges from children’s making of internal attributions for their compliance in the absence of surveillance. The mediation was found, however, only for mothers. Although father–child mutuality does predict children’s committed compliance (Kochanska et al., 2007), and compliance in the absence of surveillance predicts conscience development (Kochanska et al., 2010), mediation by the child’s moral self-concept was not in evidence.
This is the domain in which one member of the dyad acts as a source of protection and comfort when the other member is in some kind of physical or psychological distress. Discussion of this domain has been left to last because research in this area has focused less on moral development and more on other areas of psychosocial development. Nevertheless, events around protection and attachment do have significant implications for moral behavior. When the caregiver responds sensitively and appropriately to the child’s needs, the latter comes to trust that the former has his or her best interests at heart. Trusting or securely attached children learn that their parents are both able to protect them from harm and to guide them appropriately in terms of acceptable moral standards (Thompson, 1998). Accordingly, Laible and Thompson (2000) found that mother–child dyads with secure attachment relationships—the result of confidence in the caregiver’s ability or willingness to respond to distress—were more likely to have conversations about emotions and moral issues when talking about child’s misbehavior than insecurely attached dyads. The authors emphasize the role played by the attachment relationship in shaping the dyads’ emotional openness to discuss potentially threatening topics, presumably providing the underpinning for a deeper understanding of moral issues that occurs as the dyad’s interaction moves into the guided learning domain.

One of the most important outcomes in the protection domain is the development of empathy, an important precursor of moral behavior (Eisenberg, 2000; Malti, Gummerum, Keller & Buchmann, 2009). Children who are securely attached learn to understand the distress of others and to react in a sympathetic way. Children who are able to understand, feel for, and altruistically respond to the negative emotions and distress of others are also less likely to engage in antisocial behavior and are more motivated to act prosocially (Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2010): High levels of empathy seem to make children better at recognizing the impact of their own hurtful actions on another’s welfare (Hoffman, 1983). Allen and colleagues (2002) found that insecure attachment predicted lower levels of empathy, more relationship problems, and higher levels of delinquency. Similarly, attachment and empathy significantly predict less antisocial behavior and more prosocial behavior in adolescents (Thompson, 2008). We conclude, therefore, that responsiveness by agents of socialization to the distress of their children is another important antecedent of moral behavior.

Peers, Siblings, and the Development of Empathy

Although parents seem to be the precursors for children’s development of empathy and the ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings with regard to moral values, the protection domain also extends to children’s interactions with peers and siblings. Children have no real obligation to meet their equals’ needs for protection, but children nevertheless often take care, comfort, and alleviate the distress of their peers and/or siblings. Certain characteristics might influence their likelihood of engaging in protective moral behavior with peers. For example, Eisenberg and colleagues (1996) found that children who displayed negative emotions less frequently were nominated by their classmates as more likely to share and help other children in need. In another study, children with high
social status were more likely to be nominated as helpful and kind by their peers (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007). Siblings have a unique opportunity to alleviate each other’s distress, as they can provide close support in shared stressful life situations. Indeed, Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, and Rende (1994) found that siblings report closer and more intimate bonds following negative life events (e.g., death, conflicts with other children, personal accidents, and illnesses). In the face of situations of distress, both siblings and peers can also provide children with additional support, which presumably contributes to children’s internalization of values regarding care for others.

Future Directions

The study of the socialization of moral behavior has a long history indeed. And we have certainly moved a considerable distance from the original notions of incorporation or taking over of moral values and behavior from a socializing agent. We know that children influence how their parents socialize them, that they attach different meaning to socialization practices that affect their reactions to them, that they are differentially sensitive to parental and other influences, and that socialization occurs in a variety of contexts or domains, with each of these contexts leaving a different imprint on the final product. However, there are still many unanswered questions that will form the basis for future research. We touch on only a few here.

Punishment Reconsidered

A major theme in this chapter has been that of internalization and the importance of minimizing socialization approaches that would draw the child’s attention to external pressures. Thus, for example, minimal amounts of punishment in the context of more benign approaches continues to be emphasized as central in successful inculcation of values. Yet there are some who disagree with this approach. Patterson (1997; Patterson & Fisher, 2002), for example, has provided impressive evidence for the beneficial outcomes of careful control of reinforcement contingencies in the suppression of antisocial behavior. Taking a social–interactional perspective, he argues that monitoring of children controls the availability of positive reinforcers supplied by a deviant peer group, that discipline controls negative reinforcement provided by the child that encourages coercive parent–child interactions, and that family problem solving and parental involvement also help in the control of important reinforcement contingencies. In no case, however, is behavior seen to result from internalized moral values in the sense that the term is usually used. Patterson (1997), for example, argues that reinforcement contingencies are embedded in social exchanges and that these events are not actively processed. Rather, behavior endures simply because it is overlearned.

Another argument against current notions of internalization has been presented by Baumrind (2012). She maintains that frequent assertion of power or punishment by parents in order to control children’s behavior is a necessity (as well as a responsibility) and should not be viewed negatively. What matters is how the power is applied: It should be confrontative rather than coercive, that is, it should be forceful and demanding but also open to reasoning and negotiation rather than arbitrary and unqualified by reasoning.
Confrontative power assertion allows the child to choose either to comply, to negotiate, or to suffer the consequences of noncompliance, whereas coercive power assertion leaves the child with no choice. In her analysis, then, Baumrind underlines the importance of maintaining the child's autonomy—a basic premise of socialization theory, without downplaying the importance of punishment.

Baumrind addresses some misconceptualizations of power assertion, including the fact that appropriate power assertion should not be conflated with superfluous, harsh, and arbitrary assertion of power. Most relevant to the present discussion is her argument that, contrary to the position of attribution theorists, successful parents use much more than minimal amounts of power assertion. Thus, Baumrind, Larzelere, and Owens (2010) reported that parents' use of confrontative power assertion and spanking, both of which are not subtle, reduce children's misbehavior both when they are under surveillance and when they are outside the home where they are not under surveillance. They found that children who were punished by their parents in overt and forceful ways were more prosocial and better able to self-regulate in school and on the playground than those who experienced either permissive parenting practices or harsh levels of punishment. Baumrind (2012, p. 47) concludes: “Although internalization of society’s rules that are endorsed by parents may be thought of as the prime objective of the socialization agenda, the complex task of caregivers is to sustain the tension between two reciprocal processes—one in which children adapt to parents’ demands, and the other in which parents adapt their childrearing practices to accommodate their individual child’s developmental level, needs, and preferences.”

The observations and findings of Patterson and Baumrind, then, do call for further thinking about socialization processes. One important variable, for example, that might moderate the impact of punishment is the extent to which punishment is seen as fair and appropriate to the deviation. And here the move is into the realm of identifying different kinds of actions and underlying values. High levels of confrontative power assertion for violations of social conventions might be resented because such violations are somewhat arbitrary, whereas high levels of power assertion for moral violations are not. Another moderator involves children’s perceptions of the parents’ motivation for asserting power. If it is seen to be a sign of rejection from an angry parent, then it should have a quite different impact than if it is perceived as well intentioned and administered by a caring person.

**Biological Aspects of Socialization**

The study of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of socialization is being complemented by the current significant interest in the biological underpinnings of the socialization process (Fleming, Grusec, & Haley, 2012). Knowledge of evolutionary principles and physiological accompaniments of interpersonal experiences with respect to moral development help in the understanding of this central aspect of human functioning. Of course, research on the behavior, emotions, and thoughts relevant to moral development continues to be needed in order to guide research on the brain, on genes, and on hormones, orienting researchers to the questions that need to be asked and answered. We are still far from a complete understanding of features and aspects of moral development at the social level, and the coming years will continue to add to the body of knowledge.
References


The Development of Moral Behavior from a Socialization Perspective


The Development of Moral Behavior from a Socialization Perspective


Introduction

Children face moral issues within their families from very early in their lives. The tensions between a child’s own desires and needs, and issues of control, discipline, reciprocity, justice and rights, obligation and the welfare of others are experienced and negotiated daily with other family members. Parents and siblings of young children talk every day to children and to each other about why people behave and feel the way they do, about what is allowed and what is not, about moral matters pertaining to welfare, fairness, and property rights, and about social rules that reflect the conventional precepts of the particular social system within which the child is growing up. And from their second year, children participate in (and indeed initiate) such conversations with increasing frequency (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Dunn, 1988; Tizard & Hughes, 2002). Some of these family discussions are focused on relatively minor social rules, some are urgent matters of other people’s welfare and rights; some are culture-wide, and some are more “local” issues of practices within the family. Children even in their early years have views on the permissibility of actions and provide justifications for their views, and they distinguish between different domains of morality and convention (Much & Shweder, 1978; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2002).

There are powerful arguments for seeing the family as the medium through which wider aspects of the culture, moral judgments, and moral sensibility are gradually understood and appreciated by children (Hinde, 2002). There is also evidence that family experiences are related to the notable individual differences between children in their moral sensitivity and behavior (Dunn, Brown, & Maguire, 1995; Killen & Rutland, 2011). In this chapter we consider family interaction and children’s early moral development within the framework of two broad questions. First, does a focus on young children’s interactions within their families provide a useful window on the nature of children’s moral understanding and sensibility and its normative development? Second, how are individual differences in children’s family experiences related to differences in children’s moral development? Before addressing these two broad questions, a comment on the
various theoretical approaches to the relations between moral development and children’s experiences within their families is in order.

Perspectives on Family Interaction and Children’s Moral Development

In many different theoretical approaches to children’s moral development, aspects of family interaction are viewed as important contributors to the developmental story. While there are shared assumptions about the importance of family experiences, particularly in relation to the development of individual differences in moral development, there are also different emphases in the various accounts. Which features of family experience are emphasized depends on the theoretical perspective and especially on the aspect of moral development that is being investigated. Thus, some writers emphasize a sociocognitive perspective and view the development of social and emotional understanding as a key part of the development of moral reasoning and judgment, (for example, Arsenio, this volume; Dunn et al., 1995; Killen & Rutland, 2011; Smetana & Braeges, 1990; Turiel, 2002). For these approaches, it is the evidence for social interaction in the family as an influence on the development of social understanding that is relevant—for instance, the research on how family discourse relates to the development of social and emotional understanding (e.g., Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991; Laible & Thompson, 2002).

Other authors argue for the centrality of the development of the self and the growth of conscience in moral development (for example, Barry & Kochanska, 2010; Hinde, 2002; Kochanska & Aksan, 2006; Koenig, Barry, & Kochanska, 2010); many of those concerned with the development of conscience have focused on family discipline and children’s response to parent–child conflict as relevant aspects of family experiences. In contrast with this emphasis on parental disciplinary practices, it is the significance of parent–child relationships—rather than parenting—that is emphasized by others (e.g., Dunn, Hinde, Kochanska). Within this relationship framework, the significance of reciprocity within relationships has been emphasized, and also the motivating power of relationships for the development of social understanding more broadly considered (e.g., Dunn & Brown, 1993). Other researchers whose chief focus is on prosocial development (e.g., Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998) focus on those family experiences that are linked to children’s caring behavior, which can include parenting practices and relationship quality, as well as family influences on understanding feelings.

The broad issue of how emotion and cognition are implicated in moral development has been a key theme in various theoretical accounts. While much of the “classical” writing on moral development (especially moral reasoning) has emphasized cognitive processes (following Kohlberg, 1984), it is now recognized by many that emotional relationships with family members are central to the development of moral actions and understanding (e.g., Hinde, 2002; Hoffman, 2000; Kagan, 1984). Theorists have differed in the extent of their emphasis on emotions, and on the particular emotions seen as significant. Those who study prosocial development have stressed empathy, while Kagan and Hoffman have both also emphasized anxiety about disapproval or punishment, shame, and guilt; Kagan has also noted the self-satisfaction that comes from doing “the right thing.” Among the points of convergence between these various theoretical approaches to moral development, arguments for the significance of emotional as well as cognitive processes
now stand out. Both the shared perspectives and the differences in theoretical approaches are considered in more detail in this chapter.

We begin with the first general issue: how a focus on children’s family interactions can illuminate our understanding of children’s moral development.

The Nature of Children’s Moral Development: Lessons From the Study of Family Interactions

Key lessons concerning the nature of young children’s moral understanding and the social processes implicated in its development have been learned from studies of children’s interactions within their families. Some of these key principles are summarized next; we begin with the very early stages of moral sensibility.

Awareness of Other People’s Feelings and the Idea of Harm to Others

The first point is that research on children within their familiar social worlds has documented the interest and growing understanding that children show in relation to other people’s emotions during their infancy and toddlerhood (Eggum et al., 2011; Lagattuta & Makariev, this volume; Lane, Wellman, Olson, LaBounty, & Kerr, 2010; Smetana, 2006; Thompson, 1998). Understanding the feelings of others, it can be argued, forms a central core of moral sensitivity, namely, the caring dimension of moral development. Among the aspects of children’s family interactions that reveal their growing understanding of others’ psychological states and feelings, the following stand out. First, observations of empathic and prosocial behavior (see chapters by Carlo; Hastings, Miller, Kahle, & Zahn-Waxler; and Thompson & Knafo, this volume) become increasingly frequent from early in the second year. Children attempt to alleviate the distress of others, and they show concern about other people being frightened or worried well before they are able to articulate their understanding verbally (Dunn, 1988; Eisenberg & Fabes, 2006; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). Second, they attempt to alter others’ psychological states, showing their grasp of how actions can affect others’ emotional states, not only by comforting but also by teasing (deliberate attempts to annoy, disturb, or amuse others), and exacerbating their distress, and by deception (Reddy, 1991). Third, as they become verbally articulate, they discuss feeling states and other psychological states of both self and others with other family members, the causes of these inner states, and the connections between inner states and actions, with increasing frequency during the third year (Thompson, 2006; Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, 2008; Wellman, 2007; Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001; Wellman & Miller, 2008).

Observations of children within their families, then, make clear not only that children are concerned about the welfare of others who are distressed and show the beginnings of empathic responsiveness to another’s distress, but that they also understand people can cause pain to others (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Hoffman, 2000). It is not, in the second and third year, a wide or differentiated understanding of the notion of harm to others, but although limited, it is an essential foundation for sensitivity to moral issues that are related to the idea of harm to others, and others’ welfare (Arsenio, Gold, & Adams, 2006; Dunn, 1988; Lagattuta & Makariev, 2012).
Children begin helping others early in life. Observations of children within their families, and with familiar peers in day care, have documented comforting and helping behavior toward parents in the second year (Radke-Yarrow et al., 1983) and comforting actions toward siblings (Dunn, 1988). Indeed from 18 months, children are as likely as their older siblings to attempt to comfort their siblings. And experimental studies confirm that 18- and 24-month olds witnessing an adult harming another adult by taking or destroying her possessions (the victim showing no distress), showed more concern and subsequent prosocial behavior toward the victim than they showed to adults who had not harmed the adult in these ways (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006, 2007).

How do very young children react as witnesses of individuals who are victims of another's actions? To what extent do target children show sympathy toward others who are bullied or hurt by others when the target children were not themselves the target? Adults, we know, help and affiliate with helpful individuals, and avoid or punish harmful individuals (Krebs, 2008), yet until recently, relatively little research has systematically explored very young children’s selection of whom they will act helpfully toward. Recent experimental studies of children’s developing prosocial behavior toward others have included a focus on their actions that involve “third parties.” In a study of 3- to 5-year olds by Olson and Spelke (2008), the results suggest that children consider others’ moral behavior when deciding who to share with. Further research (Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2010) tested whether children respond differentially to others’ harmful or helpful behaviors: Note that the children witnessed but were not the recipients of the harmful or helpful behavior themselves. They saw an actor harming, helping, or behaving neutrally toward another person. Subsequently, the results showed they helped the harmful actor less often than the neutral or helpful actors. Importantly, the 3-year olds apparently grasped the intentions behind harmful behavior and decreased their prosocial behavior if and only if the actor could be held morally responsible for her actions—that is, when she had harmful intentions even if she was unsuccessful in causing harm. The 3-year olds helped an actor who intended to but failed to harm another less often than they helped a neutral adult, but they did help an accidentally harmful and a neutral adult equally often. Observations such as these, based on children under 5 years of age, raise the key question of how, within the family, children behave in relation to acts of sharing/helping/bullying. Observations of siblings indicate that we may well find that not only helping but also exacerbating others’ distress are seen (see the section below on siblings).

**Awareness of Adult Standards and Social Rules: The Idea of Responsibility**

Observations of children within their families also highlight that they show increasing awareness of adult standards, and social rules—what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior—through the second and third year (Dunn, 1988). They both draw the attention of parents to forbidden acts (their own and those of others), and they make attempts to evade adult attention or to deceive adults increasingly during the second and third years. This interest in what is approved and what is not permitted within the family is one theme in a broader concern that children show in behavior or objects that deviate from normal or accepted standards, as Kagan (1981) demonstrated. Within the family, such deviations are a source of interest and amusement and are frequently discussed with parent
or sibling. The children’s participation in these exchanges demonstrates not only their under- 
standing of the contravention of the “ordered relations” that are acceptable (Douglas, 1966), their grasp of the shared nature of these standards, but also their understanding of how this knowledge of standards can be used in relationships—used, that is, as a source of shared humor, and as a useful strategy in conflict with other family members. Within the family, children are also beginning to understand the idea of responsibility, that individuals are accountable to others for their prohibited actions—such as causing harm to others, or breaches of acceptable behavior. Their growing understanding of accountability during the third year is illustrated by their blaming of others (frequently siblings) and the denial of their own culpability (Dunn, 1988).

What the observations of children within their families show is that the bases of their excuses and justifications—and their jokes—include not only the idiosyncratic practices of a particular family but also some of the key principles of the wide culture outside the family—principles of possession, positive justice, fairness, excuses on grounds of incapacity or lack of intention. It appears that some of these principles are understood not in a highly context-specific way, but much more broadly. Fairness and unfairness, for instance, about distribution of goods are clearly issues that loom large for children. In a study of 3- to 5-year olds, LoBue and colleagues examined children’s emotional and behavioral responses to unequal rewards of stickers (LoBue, Nishida, Chiong, DeLoache, & Haidt, 2011). Both implicit and explicit measures revealed that from 3 years old on, the children noticed and reacted negatively to unfair distributions. The only age effect concerned the ability to talk about fairness, which increased between 3 and 5 years.

Children also differentiate between transgressions falling into moral and social conventional domains in the preschool years, an issue that we address below in considering the emotions involved in family interaction over cultural breaches, though the early stages of this differentiation are not well documented: We do not know whether such differentiation begins during the second year, for instance.

Patterns of Moral Development

A further key lesson from research on children within their families is that moral development does not necessarily proceed smoothly, and that the same child can within one family relationship demonstrate empathetic behavior, understanding of moral transgres-sions, and efforts at reparation—and in contrast not show this sensibility in the context of another relationship. Moreover, the same child can offer different justifications for the permissibility of transgressions in the context of interactions with different family members. That is, whether children show moral sensibility in action, and how they attempt to justify breaches of cultural rules, depends on the particular relationship within which he or she is interacting, a point made by Hart and Killen (1995). This raises questions about what influences moral actions, moral reasoning, and views on permissibility, which need to be considered separately. In two studies in Pennsylvania and London, we separately assessed the views of 4-year olds on the permissibility of various social transgressions (name calling, taking a toy from a friend, and excluding a friend from play), and their justifications for their views (Dunn, Cutting, & Demetriou, 2000). The children’s opinions on the permissibility of these actions toward their friends were not linked to their justifications
in terms of their reflections on the welfare, feelings, or relationships of the victim or vio-
lator, and these two features of moral understanding had quite different correlates, which
we consider in the section on individual differences, below. We argued that views on the
permissibility of transgressions reflected responses to learned rules, while justifications
offered by the children reflected the children’s sensitivity to the feelings and relationships
involved, and were linked to their understanding of feelings more broadly. In considering
the development of these different aspects of moral sensitivity, studies of children within
their close relationships with family members and friends highlight the central signifi-
cance of emotion in the developmental accounts.

Consider the comments of Kevin, in a study in Pennsylvania, as he discusses with an
interviewer whether it was OK for him to take a toy away from his sister (Dunn, 2004).
Then compare his comments about the issue of taking a toy away from his friend, Jeff.

INTERVIEWER:  What about if you took a toy away from your sister? Would that be
OK, or not OK?
KEVIN:  [cheerfully] OK . . . because she’s my sister and I hate her guts . . . well
I don’t actually hate her, but . . . but . . .
INTERVIEWER:  How about if you took a toy from Jeff?
KEVIN:  [solemnly] I would never do it. Because he’s my friend. My best, best,
best friend . . .

Later, the conversation continued, amplifying the difference in his moral sensibility
about his sister, Alice, and friend, Jeff:

INTERVIEWER:  How about if Alice took a toy from you—would that be OK or not
OK?
KEVIN:  Not OK! I would be pissed off, and I would kick her!
INTERVIEWER:  Why?
KEVIN:  [outraged tone] Because she’d be taking something from me. Because
she’d be stealing it. A crime!
INTERVIEWER:  What about if Jeff took something from you?
KEVIN:  [cheerfully] That would be OK . . . because I wouldn’t mind. Because
he’s my friend.

In our studies in Pennsylvania and in London, we followed the children we had first
seen as 3- to 4-year olds through their early years at school, observing them at home with
their friends and with their families, and talking to them and to their parents and siblings
(Dunn, 2004). When the children were 5, 6, and 7 years old, we read them each a series
of moral stories in which a child of the same age and gender, cheated, accidentally hurt
someone, or took something that didn’t belong to them, a procedure developed by Ko-
chanska (1993). The “victim” in the story was either a friend or a sibling. We also asked
the children how they would feel as the victim, and as the transgressor, and we asked how
the story would end—to see if the reparation mattered to them.

There were notable differences in the comments made by the children concerning sto-
ries involving their siblings and their friends, or other children who they didn’t consider
their friends. For instance, in the story of cheating, the protagonist won the game as a result of cheating. When asked how they would feel if they had been the cheater and if the opponent was their friend, some of the children talked about feeling bad, and worried about their friend’s feelings. Here is how one 7-year old commented: “I would feel happy but a little bit sad that she had to lose; I really shouldn’t have moved the checkers.” When asked why she’d feel this way, she replied, “Because if that was your best friend you’d feel really really bad that she’d lost and you changed checkers.” When asked to finish the story of cheating-at-checkers, she decided, “Maybe they play another game and she lets her friend win.”

This kind of reparative comment was much less frequent if the other child in the story was a sibling. Most children said then (cheerfully) that they’d feel happy that they had won! A similar picture of heightened sensitivity to social and moral issues when your friend is concerned also emerged when we discussed recent conflicts, with both their friends and their siblings. For instance, we asked the children whether they felt they had learned anything from the outcome of a recent quarrel, and in relation to their friends several commented that, yes, they did see some learning had taken place. Some examples include: “Yes, I learned you can’t always do your thing first”; “Yes, I learned it’s important to understand what my friend wants. . . .”

In contrast, such constructive inferences were much less common if a fight with a sibling was being discussed; “Yeah, I learned I should have thumped him first!”

**Emotion and Moral Development**

Children’s capacities for internalizing and acting morally depend on many basic aspects of cognitive and emotional development, including the use of language, the development of empathy (Hoffman, 2000) and sympathy, the growth of emotion regulation (Eisenberg et al., 1995), the development of understanding of mind together with the understanding that another person’s mental and emotional state may differ from one’s own (Aึsting, 1993), and comprehension of cause–effect relations (Dunn & Brown, 1993). Each of these abilities has its own developmental course, and each is important for a range of aspects of development as well as for the growth of moral understanding and behavior. While most research into moral development has focused on the cognitive underpinnings of these capacities, research on moral development within the family has highlighted the role of emotional relationships and emotion understanding in these developments, especially in the early years. (To emphasize the role of emotional relationships in these broad developments is not to suggest that arguments for sociocognitive theories of moral development in which inferences and abstractions provide the core basis of moral understanding are inappropriate. Rather, it is to stress that such emotional relationships—at least in early childhood—play a key role in the development of the social understanding that is viewed as core in the sociocognitive theories of moral development.)

Three points should be noted here. First, the feelings expressed by children, their mothers, and siblings during conflict over transgressions or matters of moral breaches, for instance, are often marked, and research on preschoolers indicates that children reason and justify their actions more frequently in those disputes in which earlier (as 18–month olds) they had shown most distress and anger (Brown & Dunn, 1996; Dunn, 1988). Distress,
anger, and amusement (the latter shown by children in many family disputes about transgressions) highlight the salience of disputes and transgression of rules for children, and these emotions may contribute to the learning that takes place in such confrontations. There may be special potential in the emotionally urgent interactions within the family. As we will see in considering individual differences in moral development, family discussion of emotion in conflict is related to early conscience development and prosocial conceptions of relationships (Laible & Thompson, 2000).

A further point is that in some models of early moral development, such as those articulated by Hoffman (1983) and Kagan (1984, 1998), it is the emotions of guilt and fear experienced by children when they fail to live up to the standards set by their parents that are seen as key to their moral development. According to this view, children's understanding of what is moral behavior comes primarily from parental socialization techniques, and the internalization of these norms leads children to experience their “moral” behavior as self-produced. The children's emotions of guilt, fear, and anxiety during disciplinary encounters are viewed as central in motivating subsequent moral behavior. The emphasis on the connection between emotion, self-awareness, and standards in these models is illuminating. Family observations, however, suggest that a wider range of emotions beyond guilt and fear are important. The significance of positive experiences within parent–child relationships for moral development has recently been stressed (Hinde, 2002; Laible & Thompson, 2000, 2002; and see below).

In addition, observations within the family reveal the pleasure and excitement children experience in transgressing rules, in cooperating with siblings in such transgressions, in confronting and teasing—that is, in exerting power within the family. The affective dynamics of family relationships provide powerful motivation for children to understand moral issues and conventional rules—in order to get their way, to share amusement, or to get out of trouble. The tension between the self-interest that is so powerful a force in children's early years and their family relationships contributes to children's growing understanding of what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior (see, for instance, Dunn's [1988, 1993] emphasis on social relationships as the crucial context for growing understanding). The argument that children are motivated to understand the moral and social rules of their cultural world in part because they need to “get things done” in their close relationships parallels Bruner's (1983) argument that the motivation to use language is “the need to get on with the demands of the culture.” In contrast with the models of moral development articulated by Hoffman and Kagan, in this “social relationships” model, the dynamics of children's relationships are central to the growth of children's social understanding, including their moral understanding.

The third point on emotion concerns the important distinction between the moral and conventional domains of cultural practices. It is now well established that children even in the preschool years distinguish between, on the one hand, moral issues (the welfare of others, fairness, positive justice), and on the other, breaches of conventional rules (see chapters by Smetana and Turiel, this volume). They judge the two types of cultural breach differently, viewing moral issues as not dependent on authority, nor determined by commonly accepted norms or agreements (Turiel, 2002), while conventions are judged to be contingent on rules, authority, and agreed-upon norms. Research also indicates that different emotions are associated with moral and conventional events (Arsenio, this
volume; Arsenio & Fleiss, 1996). In Arsenio’s studies, for instance, when children were asked to consider scenarios involving conventional transgressions, they attributed neutral or somewhat negative emotions to the participants. But in breaches involving harm to others, children attributed very negative emotions to recipients of the transgression and observers (though some positive emotions to the perpetrators—the “happy victimizers”).

However, observations within the family indicate that the neat distinction between these two domains may often be blurred during family interactions. Thus, incidents that involve breaches of conventional behavior (poor table manners, or jumping with muddy boots on a settee, for instance) are frequently treated by parents as emotionally upsetting acts, which distress them personally. A breach of social convention can be, in the context of family life, treated as a breach of personal welfare. However, it should be noted that Smetana (1989) addressed this issue specifically and did not find evidence that this happened in her toddler sample. As we see in a later section, how parents treat breaches of acceptable behavior has a profound effect on the development of individual differences in moral sensibility and judgment, and moral behavior.

**Self, Self-Interest, and Moral Development**

Research on moral development within the family has also highlighted how the drive to understand others and the social world is closely linked to the nature of children’s close relationships in the early years. The driving self-concern in the face of powerful others within the family characterizes many of children’s interactions with their parents and siblings in the early years, as they develop a more elaborate sense of themselves and an increased capacity to plan. This self-interest invests the understanding of other people, and of the social rules of the family world with especial salience. In their family relationships, children are discovering how to get others’ cooperation, how to understand others’ feelings, how to provide comfort, and how to manage disputes. Their self-interest is an important motivating factor in their developing understanding. In addition, a sense of self-efficacy (quite separate from self-interest) can come in considerable part, from solving these social problems.

This sense of self-efficacy does not necessarily imply opposition to the interests of others. Blum (1987), for instance, argues for a notion of self and of identity formation in which concern for others, or for a community with which one closely identifies, is to reach out to someone or something which shares a part of one’s own self. Self-interest should be distinguished here from being selfish and from lack of concern for others. Sympathetic concern for another family member does not conflict with an account of developing social understanding in which concern for self plays a major role. Part of being effective in the social world of the family entails monitoring the response of others to oneself, their approval or disapproval, pleasure, amusement, or displeasure. The interest and delight children show in this realm of what is allowed or prohibited is evident in their pretend play, their stories and jokes, and their questions within the family. While young children cannot yet “see themselves as others see them,” and do not stand back as observers of self until middle childhood, they begin to show shame, embarrassment, and guilt during the second and third year, and must at some level be monitoring the response of other people to them.
And the pleasure and excitement that children show in transgressing rules, in teasing and confronting family members must be acknowledged. Exerting power within their family world is a source of pleasure to them, as is cooperation and shared amusement. The general point is that children take an active part in the interactions within the family, and this participation plays a central part in their moral development and their sense of self. As Hinde (2002) notes, “Children don’t just assimilate what they are told, they actively construct their moral code on the basis of their experience. And children are motivated by a desire for self-esteem as well as fear of punishment” (Hinde, 2002, p. 52). Disciplinary encounters are one important context in which messages about the proper way to live are given, but only one context among many. And as Hinde emphasized, acquiring morality “is not merely a matter of picking up a series of do’s and don’ts: it is part of the development of the self in a particular cultural context” (Hinde, 2002, p. 48). Hinde views moral development as intrinsic to the development of self and identity and stresses that morality develops as part of, or in parallel with, the self-system (see Blasi, 1993).

Children as Family Members

The great majority of empirical studies of family socialization and moral development have focused on mother and child; though theories refer to “parents,” in practice the research on early moral development has been research on mothers (see, for instance, the studies referenced in the review by Thompson, 2006). However, children grow up as members of a family world, and from the first year onward, they show interest in what is happening between other family members. Surprisingly early, children begin to interrupt the conversation between other family members, and develop the capacity to turn the topic of such conversation to their own interests (Dunn & Shatz, 1989). Conflict between parents has a major impact on children (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 2001), and disputes between parent and sibling are also usually of much interest (Dunn & Munn, 1985). What is it that catches the attention of young children, and can an investigation of their responses to others’ conflict add to our understanding of their moral awareness?

Consider the response of children as young as 18 months and 24 months to conflict incidents between their mothers and older siblings. In research in Cambridge, we conducted unstructured naturalistic observations of families, in which family conversations were audi-taped, and a narrative record of interactions between children, their older siblings, and their mothers was kept. The focus was on how the target toddlers behaved when their mothers and older siblings interacted, recording their responses to conflict, jokes, and conversations between the other family members (Dunn, 1988; Dunn & Munn, 1985). When their mothers and siblings were in conflict, first, the topic of the dispute was important to the children: Disputes about social rules and about aggression were rarely ignored (only 16% and 17% of incidents, respectively), whereas disputes about power between mother and sibling were ignored in 37% of cases. (These included conflicts in which the sibling repeatedly refused the mother’s request, arbitrarily prohibited the mother’s action, or persisted in requesting something the mother had refused.) When the sibling behaved aggressively to the mother, the children were significantly more likely to censure or punish the sibling than when the dispute was over some conventional rule transgression (here the children usually laughed or imitated the sibling).
The salience of the disputes to the children differed dramatically by topic; the emotion of the antagonists was also important. In incidents in which the sibling or the mother was angry or upset, children were most likely to watch or to attempt to support one or other antagonist, and relatively unlikely to ignore the interaction between mother and sibling. The children rarely laughed in such incidents. In contrast, in conflict incidents in which their older sibling laughed, the children also laughed or imitated the sibling’s action. When the antagonists were emotionally neutral, the children were much more likely to ignore or simply watch. Thus, children of these ages were responsive both to the emotion and the topic of dispute between other family members—in fact, these were likely to be linked. What the children witnessed in such incidents were events in which two important features were combined: A transgression of a rule was explicitly discussed, and a display of emotion was given by people with whom the children had close and complex relationships. Their responses illustrate how already in their second year they were active participants in the daily family dramas. More recently, longitudinal studies have documented distinct trajectories of conflict and warmth; in, for instance, mother–son disputes in the prediction of youth moral disengagement and antisocial behavior (Trentacosta et al., 2011); in the formation of conscience (Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim, & Yoon, 2010)—a study that elucidates the roles of affect, sense of self, history of empathy, and distinguishes children’s internalization of mothers’ and of fathers’ rules.

Family Processes and Individual Differences in Moral Development

Parent–Child Relationships

As we have noted, in theoretical accounts of the internalization of conscience, parental socialization has been given major prominence. Parental strategies of psychologically oriented discipline coupled with parental warmth and open expression of emotions have been thought to foster the development of children’s internalized guilt feelings, while harsh and punitive disciplinary methods interfere with these developments (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994a, 1994b). Until relatively recently, much of the evidence on parental socialization and moral development upon which these ideas were based was retrospective, as noted by Kochanska (1991) in one of the first prospective studies. Since her pioneering study, much recent research has explored the significance of parent–child relationships for later moral development, and this has highlighted a number of issues that deserve mention.

Reciprocal Relationships

The first of these concerns the importance of recognizing the reciprocal nature of parent–child relationships, rather than viewing parental socialization as a one-way, direct influence on children’s moral development, as in early work on childrearing (e.g., Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957). Children interpret, evaluate, and internalize aspects of their parents’ behavior, and in turn they influence parental behavior (Grusec, Chaparro, Johnston, & Sherman, this volume; Grusec & Davidov, 2010; Kuczynski & Knafo, this volume). The quality of the relationship between child and parent affects both the extent and the direction of
influence (Hinde, 2002; Laible & Thompson, 2000). Children tend to emulate and comply with those whom they care about.

**Individual Characteristics of Children**

The individual characteristics of children (e.g., temperamental characteristics, understanding of emotions and mental states, verbal ability, ability to regulate emotions) contribute to the quality of the parent–child relationships, and play a key role in the significance of parent–child relations for moral development. This is clearly demonstrated in Kochanska’s prospective studies of mother–child relationships and later moral development (Clark, Kochanska, & Ready, 2000; Kochanska, 1991; Kochanska, Gross, Lin, & Nichols, 2002; Kochanska & Murray, 2000; Kochanska, Tjebkes, & Forman, 1998; and see Thompson & Knafo, this volume), and in recent studies of the links between children’s social understanding and their later moral understanding.

Thus, Kochanska showed that maternal socialization techniques for obtaining compliance during the preschool period that de-emphasized the use of power were associated with the development of children’s internalized conscience as 8-year olds (Barry & Kochanska, 2010; Koenig et al., 2010). However, this was only true for those children who were relatively anxious in terms of temperament. In a later study, the findings highlighted the importance of mutually responsive orientation between mother and child at toddler and preschool ages for conscience development at school age, with moral development assessed in terms of observations of moral behavior alone and in peer contexts and moral cognitions (Kochanska & Murray, 2000). Notably, the mutually responsive mother–child interaction—shared cooperation and shared positive affect—at the toddler stage predicted children’s future conscience, even after controlling for the developmental continuity of the conscience measure—confirming the value of the relationship approach to long-term moral outcome.

The idea that children’s emerging view of self, in terms of moral dimensions, plays a key role in moral development, which is stressed in various theoretical models (e.g., Hinde, 2002; Kagan, 1984), also receives support in this program of research. In a longitudinal study of compliance and opposition in children from 14 months to 56 months, Kochanska and colleagues (2002) pursued the idea that children’s committed compliance with their mothers promoted moral internalization, while their opposition interfered with such developments in the “moral self,” which, in turn, affected moral conduct. “Moral self” was assessed by a technique in which children were engaged in conversation with two large puppets, which described themselves in terms of items reflecting nine moral dimensions (confession, apology, reparation, sensitivity to violation of standards, internalized conduct, empathy, concern about others’ wrongdoing, guilt, and concern about good feeling with parents). For each item, one puppet described itself as being at the low end of the scale, and the other puppet described itself as at the high end. The child was asked to point to the puppet that was “more like me.” Internalization was assessed in terms of the child’s behavior when left alone with prohibited toys.

Some support was found for this mediational model for boys (following Baron & Kenny’s [1986] model). It was also reported that children who were less fearful in temperament, and whose mothers relied on more power assertive discipline, displayed less guilt, while guilt related positively to the development of moral self at 56 months, and to
less violation of conduct rules. The argument was that fearful temperament led to guilt proneness, and via this guilt to fewer violations of rules.

Management of Conflict in Parent–Child Relationships

Other research has provided further evidence that how mothers deal with control and disputes with their children as toddlers and 2-year olds is related to children’s responses to moral transgressions at school age. In a longitudinal study in Pennsylvania, children were observed at home with their mothers and siblings by Dunn and colleagues, with hour-long naturalistic observations (Dunn et al., 1995), and then their moral orientation and emotion understanding was assessed as kindergartners and first graders (Dunn, 1995). The children whose mothers had dealt with conflict, when the children were 33 months, by reasoned argument that took account of the children’s position, at kindergarten and first grade responded differently to hypothetical moral transgressions than children whose mothers had not used such reasoned argument. Specifically, the children whose mothers had employed reasoned argument showed more mature moral orientation and more concern with matters of reparation to the victim of transgressions than the other children.

Parallel findings were reported by Laible and Thompson (2002), who showed that constructive maternal behavior in conflict with children at 30 months predicted sociomoral competence and socioemotional understanding at age 3. The strategies that mothers used in conflict and resolution of conflict were the strongest predictors of the children’s moral development. For instance, in conflict situations within the laboratory that tended to focus on moral issues, mothers who more frequently discussed emotion had children who scored higher on behavioral internalization in a “resistance to temptation” task. (For this task, the children were left alone in a laboratory room, having been told by their mothers not to touch some attractive toys; their behavior when alone was videotaped, and coded in terms of behaviors related to touching and playing with the forbidden toys, or self-correcting.) The authors concluded that emotion-laden discourse during conflict may have consequences for children’s early conscience development because it fosters the development of moral emotions such as empathy and guilt. While the links between children’s sociomoral development and mothers’ reasoning and explanation in disciplinary encounters has been reported previously (e.g., Hart, Ladd, & Burleson, 1990; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979), Laible and Thompson (2000, 2002) emphasize that their research suggests that the benefits of maternal explanations to children in the course of disputes transcend disciplinary conflicts, to include the very wide range of issues over which parents and children argue—from factual issues, explanations of people’s behavior, and social rules, to serious matters of aggression and personal harm (see also Tizard & Hughes, 2002, for evidence on the range of issues that 4-year olds discuss with their mothers).

Discourse About Emotions

Evidence has accumulated from a range of studies that children’s participation in family conversations about emotions plays a central role in the development of individual differences in emotion understanding (Brown & Dunn, 1996; Denham & Auerbach, 1995; Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991; Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, et al., 1991; Howe, 1991; Laible &
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Thompson, 1998; Laible & Thompson, 2000; Meins et al., 2002; Thompson, 1998). The notion that such emotion understanding is in turn linked to the development of empathy and early conscience development is supported by, for example, Laible and Thompson’s (2000) study of 4-year olds, in which mothers and children conversed about real-life incidents of good and bad behavior, and children’s conscience development was assessed with a “resistance to temptation” situation, and with maternal questionnaires. The mothers who made frequent references to feelings and moral evaluatives had children who showed more behavioral internalization and who were more likely to express guilt after wrongdoing. Note that here the “outcome” measure was one of moral behavior and guilt, while other research on discourse about feelings has focused on links with moral judgments reflected in response to hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Dunn et al., 1995). It appears from these studies that both moral behavior and moral judgments were linked to maternal discourse measures.

Three important further points were made in Laible and Thompson’s (2000) study. First, maternal references to the material consequences of the child’s actions, or to social or family rules, were unrelated to any dimensions of the children’s conscience development, indicating that it was the emotion talk between mother and child that was of key importance for moral development. Second, there was an interaction between the maternal reference to feelings and the child–parent attachment quality, in relation to the development of internalization. For children who were insecurely attached to their mothers or whose mother–child relationships were low in shared positive emotions, higher frequencies of emotion-laden discourse were particularly strongly related to early conscience growth. For those whose relationships with their mothers were moderately secure, and those with average amounts of shared positive feelings, maternal references to feelings and moral evaluatives were linked to higher levels of children’s internalization. But for the children who were highly secure in their attachments to their mothers, and high in the shared positive feelings, maternal references to feelings and evaluative comments were not associated with higher levels of internalization. It appeared that having a mother who freely discusses feelings and values helped in the early growth of conscience, particularly for those children who because of insecure attachment might otherwise have problems in sharing feelings with her. Thirdly, the study highlighted the complex nature of early conscience development, which involves the acquisition of different components, some of which are related (committed compliance and behavioral internalization), and some of which are not (committed compliance and guilt). It appears that conscience should not be considered as a global trait, but as a combination of separate skills, with different developmental antecedents. But the general point that a warm, supportive mother–child relationship and early discourse about feelings, values, and behavior foster the early development of conscience appears well established.

Evidence From Research on Disruptive Children

The links between warmth in parent–child relationships, discourse about emotions, children’s developing moral awareness, and their emotional regulation and responsiveness have also been explored in research on disruptive children (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2001; Hughes, 2011; Hughes & Dunn, 2000). Disruptive children have long been thought to show a lack of empathic attitudes to moral dilemmas, but different theoretical accounts attribute the processes underlying this to quite different problems, including general problems in
verbal reasoning, specific delays in social understanding, reduced emotional regulation and responsiveness, and negative parental socialization patterns (Hughes & Dunn, 2000).

Hughes and colleagues studied “hard-to-manage” children’s moral behavior, social interactions, and reflective awareness at 4 and then 6 years (with a community rather than a clinic sample), and found that the disruptive children showed early and multifaceted problems in sociomoral reasoning, some general problems in language and social understanding, and associated relative lack of warmth and increased criticism in parent–child relations. Children who showed high levels of anger and distress during observations were less likely to give empathetic justifications in relation to moral transgressions in a story format, and in general the study gave support for the idea that emotional regulation plays a key role in the development of moral behavior. Notably, these restless, inattentive children were especially likely to engage in fantasy play involving pain and violence to others, during videotaped observations of the children playing alone with a friend, whereas other 4-year olds engaged in pretend involving nurturing, domestic themes, and this measure of their preoccupation with violence made a significant unique contribution to the individual differences in their later moral understanding (Dunn & Hughes, 2001).

**Parental Education and Social Background**

Maternal education and social background have also been linked to children’s early moral development (Dunn et al., 2000; Hughes, 2011). It was noted earlier that an important distinction needs to be made between children’s views on the permissibility of transgressions, and how they justify such views. While it might be considered “mature” for a young child to consider the act of taking a toy from another child as a transgression, a child might also say that it is permissible for a friend to take a toy from him because they like each other, and the friend knows that he does not mind. This is a relatively sophisticated rationale for viewing the act as permissible. A judgment that an act is not permissible may in any case be simply a learned convention. As such, children’s justifications for their views on transgressions may offer a more illuminating window on children’s moral understanding than their accounts of what is permissible, which may simply reflect learned conventions.

The significance of family experiences and backgrounds were found in two studies to be different for children’s views on permissibility and for their sophistication in justifying their views. In both studies, children from families with more highly educated parents and those with professional or managerial occupations were more likely to judge transgressions as not permissible (Dunn et al., 2000; Hughes & Dunn, 2000). Such connections could reflect family differences in expectations about and discussion of moral matters, differences in orientation to what is sanctioned or permitted, or in the management of control and discipline. Many of these aspects of family interaction are known to differ with family background (see Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002, for review); the proximal processes implicated in links with differences in moral understanding are at present a matter for speculation (see Vinden, 1997).

It was, however, differences in children’s understanding of inner states, rather than their social or educational background, that was correlated with the moral orientation reflected in their justifications. The children who offered justifications for their views on transgressions in terms of the welfare or interpersonal relations of the people involved were
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those who had shown more understanding of emotions and inner states. Temperamental makeup was also important, though in this study, not the dimension of anxiety highlighted in Kochanska’s research: Rather, those who were rated high on negative emotionality (easily angered or distressed) were less likely to offer interpersonal reasons for their moral views than the other children, while highly sociable children were more likely to do so.

Sibling Relationships and Social Processes in Moral Understanding

The attention of researchers to family influence on moral development has been almost exclusively on mothers—their disciplinary strategies, their handling of conflict, their socialization practices, and their discourse about emotions. Yet other family members—fathers, siblings, grandparents, cousins—may well contribute to the experiences affecting children’s moral development. (For findings on fathers’ discourse about emotions, see Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000; Jenkins, Turrell, Kogushi, Lollis, & Ross, 2003; for findings on fathers’ warmth and children’s empathy-related responding, see Zhou et al., 2002). The links between moral behavior and sibling relationships are of particular interest, as they provide support for Piaget’s (1932/1965) original argument that children’s cooperative experiences and disputes with other children have particular significance for the development of moral reasoning, in which relations of equality were seen as needed for children to construct concepts of fairness.

Links between the quality of sibling relationships and children’s moral development have been demonstrated in research in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. In the longitudinal study in Pennsylvania described above, for example, children were observed at home with their siblings as preschoolers, and then their moral orientation and emotion understanding as kindergartners and first graders were assessed (Dunn et al., 1995). The findings showed that for children of around 6 years old, a wider range of earlier social processes and individual characteristics than maternal discipline and socialization practices were implicated in their moral conceptions, as assessed on their responses to stories about transgressions. Important was not only their mothers’ manner of dealing with control and disputes when they were 2 years of age but also the children’s understanding of emotions as 40-month olds, their experiences of positive relationships with their older siblings, and their verbal ability. Those whose siblings had been particularly friendly with them during the observations when the children were 2 years old were more likely to describe the transgressors in the scenarios as guilty or bad, and to show more mature moral orientation than children whose siblings had not been so friendly. The sibling relationship variables contributed to the moral understanding independently of the other variables.

With such correlational data, causal inferences about the links between the children’s experiences with their mothers and siblings, and their later moral sensibility, or about the direction of effects, cannot be drawn. The issue of what processes underlie the connections over time needs further study. But because the children were not yet 3 years of age when the family observations were conducted, it appears unlikely that differences in the children’s moral orientation at that age elicited differences in the behavior of other family members. Yet it is quite likely that other differences in the children’s social and emotional behavior contributed both to their siblings’ friendly behavior and their mothers’ control strategies. A 2-year old who is relatively mature in emotional understanding is likely to be
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a more rewarding and satisfying companion in play for an older sibling, who is in turn especially friendly and supportive during the early childhood years, and this friendliness itself may contribute to the child's propensity to be sensitive to a victim. Other social processes may well be implicated, and merit study: Are the older siblings who are especially friendly also modeling sensitive moral actions? Or are children who are close and affectionate with their siblings motivated to understand their feelings, and develop a more “other-oriented” perspective than children whose sibling relationship is more hostile or rivalrous? The general point here is that the children’s own behavior and sensitivity may well contribute to both their mothers’ and their siblings’ behavior. The negative aspects of sibling relationships also predict antisocial behavior, as shown in Hughes’ (2011) study of siblings in Cambridge: The temporal dynamics of sibling conflicts predicted later bullying behavior.

The possible significance for moral development of another social process key to positive relationships between siblings—namely, shared imaginative play—is suggested by research on close friendships in early childhood. Three longitudinal studies of young friends (one in the United States and two in the United Kingdom) showed that children with particularly close, intimate friendships were more likely to give interpersonally oriented justifications concerning moral issues (Dunn et al., 1995; Dunn et al., 2000; Hughes, 2011; Hughes & Dunn, 2000). Specifically, the U.K. studies highlighted the links between the children’s shared imaginative play in the preschool years and their moral orientation years later. Again the direction of effects was not clear. It could be that the quality of the friends’ interactions contributed to the development of moral sensibility, or that the friendship deepened in intimacy if the children were sensitive to the moral concerns of their friends. What is notable is that shared pretend play characterizes both close friendships and close sibling relationships (Brown, Donelan-McCall, & Dunn, 1996; Dunn, 1999; Dunn & Cutting, 1999; Gottman, 1983, 1986; Howes, 1996), and that such shared pretend has been highlighted as significant in the development of mindreading in a number of different studies (Astington & Jenkins, 1995; Howe, Rinaldi, Jennings, & Petrakos, 2002; Youngblade & Dunn, 1995).

What are the proximal processes implicated in the significance of such shared pretend for moral development? Among the processes that might be key are the children’s exploration of possible social worlds, and possible transgressions and their sequela, the co-construction of dramatic narratives involving moral issues, the exploration of feelings that takes place within joint pretend play, or the discourse about inner states—notably high during joint pretend play (Brown et al., 1996; Hughes & Dunn, 1997), or indeed all of these processes. Discourse about inner states is relatively frequent between siblings—more frequent than between child and parent (Brown et al., 1996)—and has consistently been found to relate to later social understanding. Moreover, 4-year-old children with an older sibling have been reported to be exposed to and to use more mental state talk than those without older siblings (Jenkins et al., 2003).

Cultural Differences

The overwhelming majority of studies of family interaction and young children’s moral development have been conducted within Europe or North America. But family interactions, moral codes and parental practices differ widely between cultures (see chapters by
Miller & Bland, this volume; Turiel, this volume; and Wainryb & Recchia, this volume, for detailed consideration. Such detailed examination of cultural differences is beyond the scope of this chapter. As just one example, consider the differences in family values revealed in a comparison of Hindu families in India and in U.S. families (Miller & Beross, 1995). In the Indian families, there was a stress on the importance of personal desires channelled toward the good of the family as a whole, while the U.S. families gave a high priority to communicating about feelings and to personal freedom. The Indian families tended to treat interpersonal issues as socially enforceable moral duties, while in contrast the families in the U.S. sample, close relationships between people were considered less as moral matters. (Wainryb’s (2006) chapter is a starting point; see also Fang, Wellman, Liu, Liu & Kang (2008) for a study of Chinese children; Shaheian, Peterson, Slaughter & Wellman (2011) for a study of Iranian and Australian children; and Posada & Wainryb (2008) for a study of Colombian children).

In terms of the early development of children considered here, two points deserve emphasis. First, the general point that children show curiosity and interest in the rules and practices of their particular culture very early is supported by studies of children in widely differing cultures—this is not particular to one culture. The Samoan children studied by Ochs (1987) displayed skills of appropriately switching the speech register in which they addressed familiar and less familiar others, before they were 2.5 years old. Mongolian children understand by their second year that they must sit only in certain sections of the family tent (C. Humphrey, personal communication, July 1, 2007). By 20 months, a Solomon Islander greets unfamiliar visitors with the gestures of hospitality and courtesy that are so important in his or her culture (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986); young Solomon Islanders know that sibling caregivers can be disobeyed and exploited in some circumstances but not in others. The particulars vary, but common to all children in families is the importance of knowing what is allowed or disapproved, and how others will respond to their actions.

The second point is that the different cultural messages to children are likely to be mediated within the family by those aspects of family interaction described here for children in Europe and North America—by talk, by emotional messages, by the examples of interaction between other family members, as well as by direct instruction (see, for instance, the comparison of moral messages reaching 3-year olds in American and English families; Dunn & Brown, 1991). Theories that focus on details of moral reasoning predict cultural differences, but given the similarity in children’s emotional interests in families everywhere, common features in children’s concern for the feelings, goals and responses of those who share their family world are also to be expected (Dunn, 1988).

**Genetics**

Studies of links between family relationships and experiences, and children’s moral development rarely are conducted within a genetically sensitive framework. This is a serious limitation: If a style of parental behavior is associated with later individual differences in children’s moral development, the possibility that this reflects a genetic link cannot be examined. Yet several lines of evidence suggested that this is important to pursue. First, the early appearance and ubiquity of prosocial propensities is, as Hinde (2002) points out, in
harmony with the view that they are in part derived from the child’s biological heritage. (See de Waal, 1996, for evidence of chimpanzee sharing, sympathy, and third-party intervention in conflicts, and behavior conducive to reconciliation after conflicts.) As Hinde (2002) notes, chimpanzees are related to our evolutionary ancestors, and the capacity to show such behavior may have provided some of the building blocks for human moral behavior, but this is not in itself evidence that chimpanzees have anything comparable to a human moral sense).

Second, more direct evidence of the contribution of genetics to individual differences in moral development comes from twin studies (in which monozygotic twins who are identical genetically are compared with dizygotic twins who are 50% similar genetically, as are full siblings). These studies indicate that a considerable proportion of the variance in prosocial behavior and in empathy is accounted for by genetic factors, with monozygotic twins being more similar in their moral development than dizygotic twins (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Zahn-Waxler, Emde, & Robinson, 1992). There is also evidence from twin research for a genetic contribution to individual differences in children’s mindreading and emotional capacities (Ronald, Happé, Hughes, & Plomin, 2005). Parallel evidence for genetic contributions to the variance in psychopathic behavior is also accumulating (Viding, Blair, Moffitt, & Plomin, 2005). These findings should be borne in mind when we attempt to understand the mechanisms underlying associations between family relationships and moral understanding. The evidence for genetics does not of course imply that family experiences are unimportant, but it demonstrates that heritability is part of the family story that should be included in research if we are to make progress in understanding moral development. Readers interested in this huge and rapidly growing field are referred to Plomin & McGuffin (2003).

**Summary and Future Directions**

The study of children in their families illuminates the early development of children’s awareness of others’ emotions, their empathy and concern, their growing understanding of the nature of harm to others, and their increasing grasp of standards and social rules. Children understand in their preschool years how knowledge of moral and conventional issues, of accountability and responsibility, can be used in relationships as a source of shared humor and of conflict strategies. The significance of close relationships both in the normative development of moral understanding and behavior, and in the growth of individual differences, is clear. Relationships with others, and particularly parents, play a key role in both normative development and in individual differences in moral understanding. Both cognitive and affective processes are implicated in these developments. And in everyday life, reasoning and judgment about moral issues are tailored to particular relationships, and may well differ across relationship contexts (Killen & Rutland, 2011).

**Future Directions**

In this chapter we have considered the links between family relationships and moral development in early childhood. The question of what the role of the family in moral development later in childhood and adolescence may be is an intriguing one. Of the themes
discussed in this chapter in relation to early childhood, the possibility that emotion and emotional relationships lessen in importance for moral development after early childhood has been raised (Hinde, 2002); this is just one of several themes on which we lack developmental studies that span early to later childhood. Parental authority on issues of both moral and conventional issues is evident in middle childhood, and it has been argued that in adolescence, questioning and conflict between adolescent and parent is more likely to be over conventional than moral issues.

The issue of which social processes are implicated in the links between family experiences/relationships and moral development needs more research attention: The significance of participation in discourse about moral and conventional issues is clear, but we need more investigation of the role of affective experiences in such discourse. In terms of the development of individual differences in moral development, the focus on mothers needs to be broadened to include, first, systematic information on fathers and siblings—key members of children's family worlds—and, second, to include friends. What matters is the significance to children of their others.

The significance of moral awareness for children growing up at risk for disruptive behavior also deserves further attention; more generally, the relation of assessments of moral understanding to children's actions when faced with the moral dilemmas of their daily lives merits systematic attention especially within a longitudinal, developmental framework.

Finally, cross-cultural research that moves beyond moral reasoning to document children's moral actions and interactions within their everyday lives with family and friends is needed, as is research within a genetically sensitive framework. Evolutionary psychology has recently provided a key pointer for us with a focus on cooperation (Nowak & Highfield, 2012).

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How do children’s and adolescents’ cognitive and affective experiences of everyday moral conflict shape moral development? In this chapter, we summarize the developmental literature on moral emotions and moral reasoning to provide a more complete picture of how these two parts of moral development may be integrated into a more holistic view on the child’s emerging morality. This chapter reviews current theory and research on central emotions in the context of moral conflict, such as guilt, pride, and moral anger across childhood and adolescence, and their links to the development of moral reasoning. These issues are addressed in three main sections, beginning with an introductory overview of the key terms and an explanation of how they have been used in the developmental research literature. The subsequent section reviews current theory and research on moral emotions and moral reasoning. We summarize some major implications of these lines of research. Finally, we identify important areas for future research.

Foundations

The centrality of emotions and cognition in human morality has been discussed for centuries in moral philosophy (e.g., Kant, 1788/2009; Hume, 1777/1992) and continues to be debated in current psychological theorizing. Obviously, knowing that something is morally wrong and feeling that something is morally wrong are not the same (Baird, 2008). What is less obvious, however, is if (and how) knowing and feeling about right and wrong are intertwined over the course of development. This debate on the developmental relationship between moral emotions and moral cognition gains complexity when questions are asked surrounding the nature of emotions in the context of morality. Are moral emotions infused by self-reflection that transcends intentional quality, or are they merely affective mirrors of visceral arousal? According to Nussbaum (2001), the moral appraisal involved in moral emotions is both affective and cognitive. From this perspective, emotions involve structured meaning and an evaluative stance of an intersubjective self (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). Moral emotions are thus necessarily infused with at least some form
of higher-order cognitive processing. This makes it likely that emotions and moral reasoning might be intertwined in multifaceted ways over the course of moral development.

How can we conceptualize the general relation between moral emotions and moral judgments? Some contemporary psychologists argue that “gut” feelings about wrongdoing precede judgments (Baird, 2008). Accordingly, we intuitively understand what is morally right and wrong; these judgments are made in a spontaneous fashion and do not involve complex forms of moral reasoning. Rather, reasoning serves as a post-hoc justificatory mechanism of intuitive, affectively based judgments. In contrast, other researchers have argued that judgment and cognition precede emotions. For example, Piaget (1954/1981) has noted that cognitive capacities alter the very dynamics of affect (see Labouvie-Vief, 2005). Affectivity, Piaget states, may serve as a motivational factor that causes accelerations and delays in the development of cognitive complexity. What is structurally developing, however, is (moral) cognition. Neo-Piagetian researchers have criticized this stark contrast between cognition and emotion and have proposed, instead, that affectivity may not only cause variations in structures of reasoning but may also relate logically to variability in content across development (Edelstein & Schröder, 2000).

More recently, developmental researchers have agreed that ordinary moral concepts and moral emotions are linked in multifaceted ways. Thus, moral emotions such as compassion or guilt may influence a child’s understanding of the prescriptive nature of fairness and care norms (Nussbaum, 2001). In line with this notion, developmental researchers have called for an integrative approach to the study of moral emotions and moral cognitions, as well as their emergence in human moral development (Arsenio, this volume; Malti & Latzko, 2010). Although moral judgments are assumed to be at the core of morality, it is also claimed that moral emotions help children and adolescents anticipate the outcomes of sociomoral events and adjust their moral action tendencies accordingly (Arsenio & Gold, 2006). For example, neuroscience research indicates that moral reasoning involves a complex integration process between affect and cognition (Decety, Michalska, & Kinzler, 2011). Negative emotions such as guilt or shame alert the individual to the moral salience of a situation by bringing discomfort and thus can serve as an antecedent to moral judgment. Therefore, with increasing social–cognitive development, emotions become increasingly tied to an inner world of mental states shared with other people. These new inner representations give rise to new, more complex forms of emotions, such as guilt, and these feelings are in turn linked to a more nuanced understanding of the feelings and thoughts of other people (Krettenauer, Malti, & Sokol, 2008; Malti & Latzko, 2010). When individuals move from childhood to adolescence, they become increasingly aware of the complexities involved in everyday moral conflict, and this awareness is likely to be accompanied by more subtle feelings and reasoning skills. We provide empirical support for these claims in the research section below.

Developmental research has also supported the claim that moral emotions, conjointly with moral cognition, are important to the early development of moral action tendencies (Hoffman, 2000). They motivate reparative behavior, such as apologies, and they restrict immoral, aggressive behavior (Malti & Keller, 2010; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). On the other hand, if moral emotions are not anticipated, it is likely that complex moral reasoning will lead an individual to strategically try to achieve their own personal goals (Gasser & Keller, 2009). Thus, examining the interplay between emotions and reasoning
in the context of moral conflict is important if we are to understand how young people resolve the conflicts that inevitably occur in everyday life.

Based on the notion that central moral emotions such as guilt eo ipso contain self-reflection and higher-order cognitive processes that involve perspective-taking skills, we will now describe the central terminology involved in an analysis of the developmental relations between moral emotions and moral reasoning.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Moral emotions have been defined as self-conscious or self-evaluative emotions because they are evoked by the individual's understanding and evaluation of the self (Eisenberg, 2000; Tangney et al., 2007). Thus, moral emotions are engendered by one's evaluative judgments and appraisals (Nussbaum, 2001). The idea that moral emotions are self-conscious and include evaluations emphasizes their complexity (Turiel & Killen, 2010). Moral emotions are intentional by nature and thus strongly depend upon one's experiences and evaluations of the social world (Drummond, 2006). Emotions such as guilt are based on an understanding of the other person's circumstances and/or one's own internalized moral standards (Malti, Gasser, & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010). As such, these emotions genuinely have a cognitive component because they require a basic understanding of the conflict (i.e., the protagonist's situation, actions, and related consequences for self and others) (Harris, 1989).

Similarly, moral judgments involve evaluative judgments, which are based on moral principles of fairness, justice, and care. Moral reasoning describes the related process in which individuals, using logic and self-reflection, try to determine why a specific act is right or wrong from a moral perspective. This self-reflection involves the capacity to distinguish our self-oriented desires and “the importance of what we care about” (Frankfurt, 1988). Moral reasoning is essentially a social process, as it takes place in social interactions and communicative discourse with others (Habermas, 1984; Youniss, 1978). Thus, moral reasoning and moral emotions evolve as a result of consensual validation and co-constructed social meaning making (Ricoeur, 1978).

Here we focus on the development of a selected key subset of moral emotions in relation to moral reasoning. More specifically, developmental theories of morality have described negatively charged emotions such as guilt and shame, but also positively charged emotions such as pride, as quintessential parts of children's emerging morality, as these emotions genuinely express an internalized norm orientation (Malti & Latzko, 2010; Tangney et al., 2007).

Guilt has been defined as a painful feeling of regret over wrongdoing (Ferguson & Stegge, 1998). Guilt feelings indicate the self's awareness that one has acted in a morally wrong way and takes responsibility for one's actions. Guilt creates desires to punish the self or to recompense (Ferguson & Stegge, 1998). Shame, in contrast, has been conceptualized as a negative feeling evoked by the experienced imperfection of one's being. Instead of focusing on the wrongness of a particular action, as is the case in guilt, shame typically focuses on devaluing aspects of the entire self, and it is often associated with the desire to change aspects of the self (Eisenberg, 2000). Having addressed the negatively valenced emotions of guilt and shame, we now turn to the positively valenced emotion of moral pride. Mascolo
and Fischer (1995) define pride, as it pertains to morality, as an emotion generated by appraisals that one is responsible for a particular positive moral outcome. It is generated if the self has resisted moral temptation and acted in accordance with obligations and responsibilities and/or if one is responsible for a moral action (Malti & Keller, 2010).

The moral emotions defined above (particularly guilt and shame) have frequently been studied in the context of hypothetical transgressions (see Arsenio, this volume; Krettenauer et al., 2008). In these contexts, children can attribute a wide range of moral and amoral emotions. Negative (i.e., sad, guilty, ashamed) emotion attributions to transgressors have typically been labeled as “moral emotion attributions” in this line of research. In contrast, the happy victimizer phenomenon, which is commonly observed in young children, refers to the attribution of positive feelings to a moral transgressor for achieving a personal goal (Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988), despite the fact that children understand the validity of the broken rule and justify this rule with moral reasons.

Finally, we turn to empathy, which is conceptualized by researchers in a slightly different manner than the moral emotions of guilt, shame, and pride. Researchers have identified other-oriented empathy as a morally relevant emotional process (Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 2000). Empathy has been defined as an affective and cognitive response that stems from the apprehension of another’s emotional state. The affective response is similar to what the other person is feeling. The cognitive response is the intellectual identification with another person’s emotional experience (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Morris, this volume). Thus, an individual’s experience of sadness upon witnessing or learning of the sadness of another is an empathic response. Related to empathy is sympathy, which entails feelings of concern for another that stem from the apprehension of the other’s emotional state. Unlike empathy, however, sympathy does not involve feeling the same emotion that the other person is experiencing (Eisenberg, 2000).

Theoretical Background

Children’s moral emotions may play a central role in the development of moral reasoning. More specifically, theoretical accounts of moral emotions have proposed that moral emotions may be an important part of why children apply moral justifications in complex moral situations and why they adhere or fail to adhere to their own moral standards (Malti & Latzko, 2012; Tangney et al., 2007).

Moral emotions require self-awareness and self-representation and thus differ from basic emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2007). As such, these emotions emerge developmentally later than basic emotions such as happiness or fear. Another important feature is that these emotions are cognitively complex and may require theory of mind skills. In line with this assumption, researchers have argued that moral emotions possibly emerge by the end of the child’s third year of life (Lagatutta & Thompson, 2007). At the same time, research has provided ample evidence that 3- to 4-year-old children have developed an understanding of the validity of justice and care norms, and they distinguish these rules from other social rules (Turiel, 1983; see Leslie, Knobe, & Cohen, 2006). As a result, young children might be able to make moral judgments about moral issues and anticipate early forms of moral emotions. On the other hand, the emergence of more differentiated moral judgments and the ability to attribute multivalence (i.e., mixed) emotions to wrongdoers may require that
children already possess the ability to understand and coordinate conflicting perspectives of the self and others, a sine qua non for reaching these benchmarks of moral development (Sokol & Chandler, 2003). Thus, more advanced forms of perspective-taking ability typically are required for more differentiated moral reasoning and complex moral emotions. A more nuanced understanding of moral emotions, such as guilt feelings or shame, is assumed to emerge around the age of 6–8 years (Harris, 1989). The understanding of guilt feelings requires complex cognitive abilities, particularly the integration of the understanding of a moral rule's validity with the understanding that other’s evaluation of the self depends upon the self’s own actions (Krettenauer et al., 2008). Thus, both moral emotions and moral reasoning become more differentiated with the development of perspective-taking skills.

Below, we will show theoretical perspectives that have emphasized that the relation between moral emotions and moral reasoning depends upon (a) the function of emotion (anticipatory versus consequential), (b) situation–affect links, and (c) perspective-taking skills.

**Anticipatory and Consequential Emotions and Moral Reasoning**

One theoretical perspective has claimed that self-conscious emotions serve important moral functions because they are evoked by self-reflection and self-evaluation (Tangney et al., 2007). These self-evaluative processes can happen before or after the moral decision-making process and the actual (im)moral act. Thus, researchers have distinguished between anticipatory and consequential emotions. Individuals can anticipate their likely emotional reactions following moral conflict situations, and these may influence moral decision making and moral reasoning. Emotions can also be consequential, and act as feedback on actual behavior and reasoning about this behavior. Most existing developmental research has focused on anticipatory emotions thus far.

This model describes general relations between moral emotions and moral reasoning, depending on the function of the emotion. The developmental vicissitudes involved in these relations have not yet been fully conceptualized in this model. For example, young children's inability to anticipate moral emotions following moral transgressions might be due to rudimentary and not fully developed theory of mind skills, whereas older children and adolescents' anticipation of moral emotions may relate to inter-individual differences in the relevance of morality to the self and/or may be bound by context. For example, some people might prefer moral over selfish concerns, and others might prefer selfish over moral concerns in certain situations. In contrast, consequential emotions are involved in the actual decision-making process, which is likely to be associated with the anticipation of actual consequences, such as punishment. Since these emotions influence judgments (Krebs & Denton, 2005) and vice versa (Pizzaro & Bloom, 2003), it is likely that moral emotions and moral judgment are intertwined and conjointly influence the decision-making process (Krettenauer, Jia, & Mosleh, 2011). This makes an empirical analysis of the development of consequential emotions and reasoning more complex.

**The Affect–Event Model**

According to Arsenio, Gold, and Adams (2006), the process of how moral emotions guide children’s sociomoral reasoning can be described in a four-step model. We briefly review
this model, as it provides a conceptual background for our review of the empirical litera-
ture. A more detailed description is provided by Arsenio (this volume). The first two steps
posit that different types of events have different emotional outcomes, and children’s con-
ceptions of these affect–event links reflect these distinctions. Next, children become able
to more fully understand and apply these links. Finally, children might coordinate their
own negative emotional experiences with their observations, and lay a foundation for
emerging principles of fairness. Children judge moral transgressions negatively because
they experience them as emotionally salient, and they associate moral emotions such as
guilt with these events. It is likely that with children’s increasing moral understanding,
they recognize that moral transgressions are serious, generally wrong, and deserving of
punishment. This understanding, in turn, is linked to corresponding emotional reactions,
such as the attribution of guilt.

Moral Emotions, Moral Reasoning, and the Development of the Moral Self

Moral emotions are genuinely social, and the endorsement of moral norms is enforced
through internalized feelings, such as guilt (Gibbard, 1990). Researchers have argued that
the presence of moral emotions indicates moral awareness, or the beginnings of the moral
self (Keller, 2004; Keller, Brandt, & Sigurdardottir, 2009; Malti & Latzo, 2010). Based on this
theoretical notion, Malti and Keller (2010) devised an integrative theoretical model that
connects research on the development of moral emotions and moral reasoning with the
moral self and the development of perspective-taking skills. Accordingly, moral emotions
provide an early foundation for the development of the moral self and moral action tenden-
cies because they indicate that the self feels committed to a norm (Johnston & Krettenauer,
2011; Malti, Gummerum, Keller, & Buchmann, 2009; Malti & Krettenauer, 2013).

Although even young children are genuinely other-oriented and concerned for oth-
ers’ welfare, they often have difficulties connecting their concern for others’ perspectives
to their moral reasoning (Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005). The early developmental
precursors of the moral self might be what has been called a “theory of agency,” which
entails a coordination process involving moral emotions, reasoning, and children’s actions
in relation to others (Krettenauer et al., 2008; Carpendale, Lewis, Mueller, & Racine,
2005; Sokol & Chandler, 2003). This includes sociomoral knowledge about persons, in-
teractions, and norms. Cognitively, the self increasingly comes to understand the world of
others by participating in social interactions. Affectively, the moral self is characterized by
an empathic sharing of the consequences of its actions on others. Emotions and reasoning
in the context of moral conflict may develop meaningful links to perspective-taking skills:
When children first learn to distinguish between the perspectives of the self and others,
the self becomes aware that moral transgressions have negative consequences for others.
However, the self does not take these consequences into account, thus leading to the
happy victimizer phenomenon. In the second step, when children learn to coordinate the
two perspectives, they realize that transgressions not only have negative effects on others,
but also give rise to the moral emotions of guilt or shame (the unhappy victimizer). The
negative feelings are accompanied by moral reasons or altruistic concerns. Next, children
develop a generalized third-person perspective. This perspective helps to establish a self-
evaluative system that determines how one ought to treat others to establish and maintain
relationships built on trust. Feelings of guilt or shame emerge when the person violates this trust (unhappy moralist). The moral self has positive moral feelings, such as pride, provided it acts in accordance with its obligations (happy moralist). This perspective typically develops in adolescence.

This developmental model assumes both normative developmental trends and individual differences in moral emotions and moral reasoning. For example, young children do understand the validity of moral rules yet frequently attribute positive feelings to transgressors. The happy victimizer phenomenon in young children might be interpreted as resulting from a lack of social–cognitive competence (Harris, 1989). Various social–cognitive prerequisites for the development of moral emotions have been considered in research, such as an interpretive theory of mind or an understanding of mixed emotions (Sokol & Chandler, 2003; see Carpendale & Lewis, 2006). Likewise, although many children shift from positive to negative emotion attributions in middle childhood, it has also become clear that the attribution of positive feelings remains well into adolescence (Krettenauer & Eichler, 2006; Malti, Killen, & Gasser, 2012). Thus, it is likely that stable inter-individual differences in these moral emotions exist. In summary, this model assumes that emotions and cognitions become increasingly coordinated into one’s identity over the course of development, and that both are based on the ability to take and coordinate the perspective of self and other.

Current Research

In this section, we review the major studies addressing the development of moral emotions and moral reasoning in the context of peer and friendship relations. This will include research on moral emotions and moral reasoning in the context of (a) hypothetical moral transgressions, (b) hypothetical moral dilemmas, (c) real-life experiences of moral transgression, and (d) social exclusion. Furthermore, we review the literature on empathy-related responding and moral reasoning. It is important to note that the majority of studies in these areas of research have focused on children and adolescents between 3 and 18 years of age and have predominantly studied negatively valenced emotions such as guilt, sadness, and shame. Studies with infants and toddlers have used observational paradigms to study early precursors of guilt and links to moral behavior (e.g., Kochanska, Gross, Lin, & Nichols, 2002). Since we focus on the relation between moral emotions and moral reasoning, we review the extant literature on children and adolescents from 4–18 years.

The Development of Moral Emotions and Moral Reasoning in the Context of Hypothetical Moral Transgressions

A central approach to the study of moral emotions in peer contexts has been to study the emotions that children and adolescents expect will follow from various (im)moral acts. Thus, research on moral emotions has frequently employed the happy victimizer paradigm to investigate the attribution of emotions to hypothetical victimizers or the self as victimizer following rule violations (for reviews, see Arsenio et al., 2006; Krettenauer et al., 2008). Children and adolescents are typically presented with scenarios in which a protagonist violates a moral rule (e.g., pushing somebody off a swing or stealing sweets) in
order to achieve a personal goal and are then asked to attribute emotions to the protagonist or the self-as-protagonist. Such emotion attributions generally have a strong cognitive component because they require a basic understanding of the conflict, specifically the protagonist’s situation and actions and the related consequences for the self and others (Krettenauer et al., 2008; Harris, 1989; Piaget, 1954/1981). Within the framework of the happy victimizer paradigm, negative emotion attributions, such as guilt and shame, are seen as important indicators of moral development because they reflect a person’s internalized knowledge about a moral norm. In contrast, positive emotion attributions, such as happiness, are interpreted as indicators of a lack of moral awareness. This research is integrative in that social–cognitive development underlies both the emergence of moral judgment and moral emotions. This leads to the question of how individuals coordinate emotions and reasoning about rules and emotions that they expect themselves or others to anticipate during moral conflict situations (see Killen & Rutland, 2011).

The Munich Longitudinal Study (LOGIC; Weinert & Schneider, 1999) was one of the first attempts to use this paradigm in order to obtain information on the development of moral emotions and moral cognition in children and adolescents. It revealed a gap in children’s moral cognitions and moral emotion attributions, with the latter lagging behind the former (Nunner-Winkler, 1999). Thus, one of the earliest findings in this tradition is that children below the age of 6 years attributed positive feelings to the victimizer even though they acknowledged the validity of the moral norm (physical integrity or property rights) by giving genuine moral reasons (Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988). By age 6, children start to attribute negative or mixed (i.e., positive and negative) emotions, thereby establishing a developmental benchmark in moral development (Lagattuta, 2005). The observed decrease in the happy victimizer phenomenon signals an important developmental transition in children’s moral emotion attributions (Arsenio, this volume). This transition involves the child’s understanding that immoral conduct makes a transgressor feel sad, guilty, or remorseful.

However, some studies have revealed more complexity in this picture. For example, Keller, Lourenço, Malti, and Saalbach (2003) have shown that emotion attributions also depend on perspective: Children from Germany and Portugal attributed negative emotions more frequently and earlier to the self-as-victimizer than to a hypothetical other victimizer (see Malti & Keller, 2010, for a study with a Chinese sample). Furthermore, it has also become clear that individual differences in self-attributed emotions continue to exist well into mid-adolescence (Arsenio, Gold, & Adams, 2004; Krettenauer & Eichler, 2006).

In addition to these subtle complexities involved in the development of moral emotion attributions, it is also not fully understood how moral emotion attributions relate to children’s and adolescents’ reasoning about judgments and emotions. Thus, research on the relation between emotion attributions and moral reasoning has been relatively scarce so far, and the existing empirical evidence has revealed mixed findings. For example, Smetana, Campione-Barr, and Yell (2003) investigated associations between children’s emotion attributions and their moral judgments in a sample of 6– to 8-year olds. The latter were assessed by ratings of transgression severity, deserved punishment, and moral evaluation. Children who rated transgressions as less serious endorsed more neutral affect; however, no other significant associations between emotion attributions and moral judgments were
found. In contrast, in a recent longitudinal study, Malti, Eisenberg, Kim, and Buchmann (2013) documented that the moral reasoning of 6- to 7-year-old children was related to their moral emotion attributions. Moral reasoning was assessed by justifications following children’s emotion attributions. Similarly, Malti et al. (2010) found that the attribution of happy emotions was negatively related to moral reasoning in 7- and 9-year olds, but not in 5-year olds. In contrast, the attribution of sad emotions was positively associated with moral reasoning in 9-year olds only. In this study, moral reasoning was assessed by a composite score of justifications following moral judgments and emotion attributions. These findings may indicate that moral reasoning and the attribution of moral (i.e. sad) emotions become increasingly coordinated over development.

This argument is supported by research on adolescent moral development, which indicates an increasing coordinative process between moral affect and moral reasoning. For example, Krettenauer and Eichler (2006) documented that as adolescents’ metacognitive understanding of moral beliefs developed, self-attributed moral emotions and confidence in moral judgment became more closely associated in a sample of 16-year-old German adolescents. Over the course of adolescent development, it appears that the intensity of moral emotions becomes an additional source of confidence in one’s moral judgment. These findings support the theoretical notion of an emergent integration between the self and morality in adolescence (Blasi, 2004; Damon, 1996).

The Development of Moral Emotions and Moral Reasoning in the Context of Hypothetical Moral Dilemmas

Research in the happy victimizer tradition has provided valuable information on how children anticipate negatively charged emotions in the context of transgression and how these emotions may become increasingly coordinated with moral reasoning and judgment. Yet, this research has almost exclusively focused on hypothetical transgressions. In contrast, the dilemma method elicits more complex forms of moral emotions and reasoning, as it necessitates the reflection on an action choice that is either consistent with or violates one’s moral obligations. It takes into consideration the emotional consequences of one’s action choices for both the self and others (Keller, 2004). This adds complexity, requiring the differentiation and coordination of different perspectives.

Developmental researchers have therefore begun to investigate patterns of emotions and reasoning following hypothetical moral dilemmas. In these contexts, children can feel unhappy about a choice that is consistent with a moral norm because they acknowledge the negative consequences for the third party involved in the moral dilemma. They could also feel proud about the choice because they decided to act in accordance with a moral norm (i.e., the “unhappy and happy moralist effects”; Oser, Schmid, & Hattersley, 2006). Thus, this paradigm allows the investigation of both negatively valenced moral emotions such as guilt and positively valenced moral emotions such as pride.

Recent studies have provided evidence that emotions in the context of moral dilemmas relate to both decision making and moral reasoning in meaningful ways. For example, Saelen and Markovits (2008) analyzed moral decision making (e.g., breaking or keeping a promise) in a sample of Canadian adolescents. Participants were asked to rate the probability that the protagonist would choose the immoral action along with the intensity of
various emotions following from this action. Guilt and satisfaction best predicted adolescents’ probability ratings for (im)moral actions. Similarly, Krettenauer and colleagues (2011) investigated the impact of emotion expectancies on moral decision making in hypothetical situations in a Canadian sample of 16-year olds. Participants were confronted with a set of scenarios that described various emotional outcomes of (im)moral actions and needed to decide what they would do in the protagonist’s role. Feelings of pride as a result of acting morally predicted moral decision making in prosocial contexts (such as helping and donating). This resonates with findings that show that children between ages 7 and 11 ascribe increasing levels of pride to protagonists who behave morally in hypothetical situations (Kornilaki & Chlouverkis, 2004). In contrast to pride, Krettenauer and colleagues (2011) found that feelings of guilt over failing to act morally were most predictive of moral decision making in antisocial contexts (such as stealing).

Using longitudinal data from Iceland, Malti and Keller (2010) examined moral emotions following a hypothetical dilemma situation (i.e., keeping a promise to a friend or accepting an attractive invitation of a new classmate) in a sample of 7-year olds, who were reassessed at 9, 12, and 15 years. The happy victimizer pattern occurred only rarely and only in the youngest age group of 7-year olds. In contrast, the unhappy victimizer pattern declined from 9 to 15 years of age, whereas the happy moralist pattern increased across development. In a cross-sectional study from China with 7- to 9-, 12-, and 15-year-old participants, Malti and Keller (2010) replicated the finding of the happy victimizer pattern. Unlike the Icelandic sample, however, results from the Chinese sample, did not demonstrate developmental trends for the unhappy victimizer and happy moralist patterns. Interestingly, the unhappy moralist pattern in the Chinese sample increased between 7 and 12 years of age.

Further evidence for a developmental increase of the happy moralist pattern was provided by data from a recent study by Malti, Keller, and Buchmann (2013). Using a representative longitudinal sample of 995 Swiss 15-year-old adolescents followed for 3 years (until the age of 18), the authors asked about decisions and emotions following moral dilemmas. These dilemmas typically included fairness norms—for example the temptation to break a verbal agreement (i.e., keeping a promise) for selfish reasons (breaking the promise to get a more attractive outcome).

Adolescents predominantly made moral decisions and reported feeling happy as a result. With age, participants reported more happiness following moral decisions. Interestingly, a small number of adolescents made selfish decisions and yet still reported happy feelings following these decisions. These findings also indicate that the readiness to sacrifice selfish or “first-order” (Frankfurt, 1988) desires in favor of what is morally right may increase developmentally because of an increase in adolescents’ awareness of the consequences that their actions have for themselves and others.

Taken together, these findings provide evidence that moral emotions are associated with children and adolescents’ decision making and moral reasoning in multifaceted ways. There are interesting developmental findings pertaining to the decline of the happy victimizer pattern. Despite this decline, there was a minority of adolescents who continued to be happy victimizers (i.e., they made a selfish choice for amoral reasons and felt positive about this choice). On the other hand, the findings also show that most of the older children and adolescents turned out to be happy moralists. This indicates that older children and adolescents may become increasingly aware of the consequences of their
actions in relation to a moral norm, and that they link these consequences to the moral self, which at this point in development is a “relationship self” (i.e., one that views relationships with others as an integral component of the self) (Sullivan, 1953).

The Development of Moral Emotions and Moral Reasoning in the Context of Children’s Own Interpersonal Moral Conflicts

The bulk of research on the development of moral emotions and moral reasoning has been conducted using hypothetical contexts of transgression and dilemma situations. An alternative promising approach for gaining insight into how children reconstruct and attach meaning to their emotions and cognitions in the context of moral conflict is to use narratives of the child’s own social experiences (e.g., Wainryb et al., 2005). Narrative (storytelling) represents a central aspect of human existence and captures much of an individual’s real-life moral experiences, including both personal (e.g., cognitive, emotional, conative) and contextual elements (e.g., gender, race, class, culture) (Tappan, 1991). As such, narrative approaches are well suited to examine the construction of moral agency (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010).

Although moral emotions are not specifically addressed in the literature on narrative development, a recent line of research has begun to investigate how children make meaning of their own emotional and social experiences in real-life situations involving moral conflicts. Because narratives represent contextualized social interactions, it is likely that moral emotions and moral reasoning are different for narratives of real-life situations and for hypothetical scenarios. Moreover, real-life situations are more complex than hypothetical situations because, in addition to moral considerations, perpetrators must justify their own transgressions by referring to their own goals (Wainryb et al., 2005).

A study by Wainryb et al. (2005) investigated 5- to 16-year-old children and adolescents’ narrative accounts in which they had inflicted harm on their peers. The authors examined children’s moral concepts and emotions that are actively produced during a narrative. One finding pertained to children’s accounts of situations in which they had been the perpetrator. In this case, children referred to their own internal states but also made references to their actual behaviors. Interestingly, when speaking about the other child, their focus was not so much on the actual behavior but on the other child’s emotions. Thus, children were able to distinguish the relative perspectives of self and other within the conflict situation and coordinate this with internal states and emotions.

In a sample of 190 5- and 9-year-old Swiss children, Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, Malti, and Gasser (2010) examined children’s experiences using hypothetical transgressions and narratives that described their own moral conflicts. In their narratives, children were asked to talk about a situation where they—as perpetrator—did or said something that hurt another child (see Wainryb et al., 2005). After the narrative, children were interviewed and asked both how they felt after harming the other child (self as victimizer) and how the other child felt (i.e., the victim) in their narratives. The child also had to justify the moral emotion attributed to the self as victimizer. In addition, two hypothetical transgression scenarios were used to elicit children’s emotion attributions to the self as victimizer. The same interview procedure was used for the two hypothetical transgression scenarios as for the real-life narratives. The participants were told two stories, each containing a moral...
transgression representing a typical overtly aggressive behavior, specifically physical aggression (hitting) and verbal aggression (teasing).

As expected, and in line with happy victimizer research, children attributed both positive and negative emotions to the self-as-victimizer in the context of hypothetical transgressions. The emotions arising in children's real-life narratives, however, differed from those generated in the context of hypothetical transgressions. More specifically, all self-evaluative emotions mentioned spontaneously in children's narratives were negative. In these narratives, guilt and anger were the emotions most frequently attributed to the transgressor (i.e., the self), whereas sadness was the predominant emotion attributed to the victim (i.e., the child who had been hurt). These results correspond well to Wainryb et al.’s (2005) findings, and they show that, in the context of real-life moral transgressions, the emotions produced spontaneously in children’s narratives are always negative. Thus, no indications of the happy victimizer phenomenon were found. Interestingly, the hypothetical transgressions were also judged by all the children to be more severe than were real-life transgressions. Conversely, real-life transgressions were more often presented as legitimate. When children refer to their own transgressions, they may try to present themselves as morally intact by attenuating inconsistencies between their actions. These results confirm findings by Smetana et al. (1999) indicating that hypothetical and actual transgressions are justified differently. These results are also in line with research investigating the role of narratives in developing a moral identity (e.g., McAdams, 2008), that is, the reduction of cognitive inconsistencies by presenting oneself as a “good” person is aimed not only at others but also at the self. Perhaps even young children strive to present themselves as morally good persons, thereby showing a basic understanding of what a moral audience expects of them, and integrating moral affect and moral reasoning.

In summary, this research shows interesting differences in how children construct emotions and justify transgressions in their own experiences. Future longitudinal research might shed further light on the development of children’s capacity to construct moral emotions and moral reasoning and how this narrative capacity relates to theory of mind development (Sokol & Chandler, 2003), and understanding of self (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

The Development of Emotions and Reasoning About Social Exclusion

Recent research has addressed young children’s emergent judgments and emotion attributions about social exclusion. Investigating contexts of social exclusion further elucidates the role of children’s emotions and reasoning about behavior in their actual exclusive behavior (Hitti, Mulvey, & Killen, 2011). Social exclusion has been investigated by assessing how children evaluate a group’s decision to exclude someone from the group on the basis of gender, race, or nationality (Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, & Ferrell, 2009; Killen et al., 2007). Social domain research has studied children’s and adolescents’ reasoning about exclusion to understand how children coordinate moral and social conventional knowledge when evaluating social events (Killen, 2007). Most research on social exclusion has measured judgments and attitudes, focusing on how individuals evaluate the act of exclusion (legitimacy ratings).

A related line of research has focused on emotion attributions in the context of transgressions (Abrams, et al., 2009; Malti & Latzko, 2010, 2012; Turiel & Killen, 2010). This
The Development of Moral Emotions and Moral Reasoning

A line of research has recently begun to examine the emotions attributed to excluders or excluded individuals and emotion attributions within minority and majority populations. For example, research has measured children’s emotional responses to a moral transgression committed by an in-group member. This assessment provides insight into how children negotiate group processes (Hitti et al., 2011). Children anticipate a sense of responsibility for the actions of other in-group members at around 7 years of age (Bennett, Yuill, Banerjee, & Thomson, 1998; Killen & Rutland, 2011).

Recent studies have more systematically investigated the question of how children and adolescents judge and feel about social exclusion. For example, Malti and colleagues (2011) examined 12- and 15-year-old Swiss and non-Swiss adolescents’ judgments and emotion attributions about social exclusion and how these vary when exclusion is based on different characteristics of the excluded individual, including nationality, gender, and personality. Adolescents judged exclusion based on nationality as less acceptable than exclusion based on gender or personality. Non-Swiss participants who reflected upon newly immigrated children to Switzerland viewed exclusion based on nationality as more wrong than did Swiss participants, and attributed more positive emotions to the excluder than did Swiss participants. Interestingly, participants attributed pride, happiness, sadness, or empathy to the excluder, whereas the excluded individual was expected to predominantly feel sad or angry. This may indicate that attributing emotions to an excluder requires balancing reasoning about group functioning and moral norms.

Gasser, Malti, and Buholzer (2012) studied judgments and emotion attributions about the exclusion of disabled children using a sample of 6-, 9- and 12-year-old children. Overall, 9- and 12-year-olds were more likely than 6-year-olds to decide to include disabled children, and these inclusion decisions were primarily made for reasons of fairness. Six-year-olds were also less likely to attribute moral (i.e., negative) emotions to the excluder than were 9- and 12-year-olds. Thus, children increasingly coordinated their inclusion decisions with the corresponding attribution of moral emotions and moral reasoning.

Peer groups are likely to influence children’s judgments and emotion attributions about exclusion, especially when children find themselves in the role of the bystander. For example, how does being in the role of the bystander relate to the interpretations of emotion and the evaluation of social exclusion? Strohmeier, Malti, and Killen (2012) investigated this question. They analyzed the role of bystander behavior on judgments and emotion attributions about exclusion in a sample of 12- and 16-year-old Austrian adolescents. Adolescents watched actual transgressions on video and responded to film vignettes in which a group of three students refused to let a fourth student join them playing a game in an everyday encounter at school. The vignettes varied as a function of bystander behavior (i.e., no bystander, onlooking bystander, inclusive bystander). Overall, adolescents judged social exclusion without bystanders as less acceptable, for reasons of unfairness, than social exclusion with both onlooking and integrating bystanders. They attributed more happiness and pride to excluders in the presence of bystanders than without bystanders. These findings provide information about adolescents’ interpretations of why children exclude others. More specifically, adolescents’ emotions may reveal underlying biases that contribute to patterns of exclusion. For example, children may attribute positive feelings to the excluder in the presence of bystanders because they are perceived as quiet support or even encouragement of the action. Thus, exclusion without bystanders might be
evaluated from a moral stance, whereas the presence of bystanders might elicit children’s intentions to preserve group norms and group identity.

Taken together, the findings for social reasoning, emotion attributions, and group status provide a window into when exclusion is viewed as legitimate, and how it may manifest in peer interactions. Reasoning and emotion attributions about social exclusion reveal how children and adolescents balance group functioning and moral norms.

The Development of Empathy-Related Responding and Moral Reasoning

Theorists have suggested that empathic responding is associated with other-oriented and higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning (Eisenberg, 1986; Hoffman, 2000). Furthermore, empathy (or sympathy) may act to stimulate other-oriented moral reasoning. A review of the research on empathy/sympathy and moral reasoning supports the view that these affective and cognitive processes are connected in meaningful ways.

Although there is an increasing body of research examining early displays of empathy and sympathy in infancy and toddlerhood (see, for example, Roth–Hanania, Davidov, & Zahn–Waxler, 2011), the current discussion focuses on links between sympathy and moral reasoning and thus begins with research findings from early childhood. To provide information on their moral reasoning, children must be able to explicitly identify and describe their thoughts and decisions in moral contexts. Such identification and description requires relatively sophisticated cognitive and linguistic abilities (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006), which necessitates the exclusion of findings from infancy and early toddlerhood from the current discussion.

Miller, Eisenberg, Fabes, and Shell (1996) conducted a multimethod study in which they found a positive correlation between moral reasoning and sympathetic responding in early childhood. In this study, sympathetic responding was measured in four ways: (a) children’s verbal self-reports of emotion after watching two short films depicting peer distress, (b) nonverbal self-reports of emotion using picture cues in response to the films, (c) facial affective responses to the films, and (d) facial affect responses to adult simulated distress. Prosocial moral reasoning was assessed by coding each child’s responses to four prosocial moral dilemmas. In Miller et al’s prosocial moral dilemmas (1996), the needs of the self are set in conflict with the needs of another, and participants must decide to act in accordance with their own self-interest or in the interests of the other. Children then provide justifications for their decisions. Higher levels of sympathetic response were associated with higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning. Importantly, the findings from this study demonstrate that links between sympathy and moral reasoning are present early in development (Miller et al., 1996).

Studies on empathy-related responding and moral reasoning in middle childhood have also documented a positive association. For example, Eisenberg and colleagues (1987) conducted a longitudinal study in which children empathy, at 9 years of age, was concurrently related to general levels of moral reasoning and longitudinally related to needs-oriented reasoning one year later. This finding supports the suggestion that empathic responsiveness may promote the development of more differentiated moral reasoning (Eisenberg et al., 1987). In a similar vein, Ryan and Connell (1989) found that empathic responding in third to sixth graders was positively related to level of prosocial moral reasoning and unrelated to reasoning based on fear, punishment, or rule compliance.
Research by Malti and colleagues (2009) has assessed the relationship between sympathy and moral motivation in large samples of 6- to 7-year-old Swiss children. Moral motivation is defined as the willingness to abide by a moral rule despite conflict with other amoral motives or desires (Malti et al., 2009; Nunner-Winkler, 1999, 2007). The measurement of moral motivation incorporates moral reasoning skills as it requires participants to provide justifications for their anticipated emotions. In the study by Malti and colleagues (2009), children were presented with hypothetical moral rule violations (e.g., one child pushes another off a swing) and were asked to judge the validity of the moral rule that was violated (i.e., “Is it right, what the protagonist did? Why/why not?”) and describe how they would feel if they had committed the same transgression and why (i.e., “How would you feel afterwards if you had done this? Why?”). The authors found a positive association between sympathy and moral motivation, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally.

This pattern of positive association between empathy-related responding and moral reasoning extends into adolescence. For example, studies examining individual differences in sympathy/empathy and moral reasoning in adolescence have been conducted in Brazil (Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001), Hungary (Kozeki & Berghammer, 1992), and Spain (Carlo et al., 2010), in addition to the United States (e.g., Carlo, Eisenberg, & Knight, 1992; Eisenberg et al., 1991, 1995). Studies by Eisenberg and colleagues (1991, 1995, 2001) and Carlo and colleagues (1992, 2010) found a positive relation between adolescents’ level of sympathy/empathy and level of prosocial moral reasoning. Similarly, Kozeki and Berghammer (1992) found a positive association between empathy and moral motivation.

Taken together, empirical findings spanning several cultures and a developmental range from early childhood through late adolescence suggest that empathy-related responding and prosocial moral reasoning are not isolated constructs, but are meaningfully linked. Specifically, the empirical findings reviewed herein are consistent with theory linking empathy-related responding and moral reasoning (e.g., Eisenberg, 1986; Hoffman, 2000). The reviewed findings suggest that the experience of empathy or sympathy may stimulate both the development and use of moral reasoning processes that are based on care and concern for others’ welfare and, inversely, that such moral reasoning may promote feelings of sympathy or empathy.

Implications

In this chapter, we have reviewed research on the relations between moral emotions and moral reasoning across development. It has become clear that these relations are multifaceted and depend upon a variety of individual and contextual factors, including social–cognitive skills such as theory of mind, the function of the moral emotion (i.e., anticipatory versus consequential), and situational context (i.e., hypothetical versus real life; simple transgression versus multifaceted situations of social exclusion). Research in the happy victimizer paradigm has revealed a developmental increase in moral emotions, and there is some support that this increase might be accompanied by more moral and altruistic reasoning. Research on moral emotions and reasoning following children’s and adolescents’ own decisions indicate that when a person does something “right” from a moral viewpoint, he or she will mostly feel positively for moral reasons. Interestingly,
however, children and adolescents sometimes feel happy about immoral decisions for selfish reasons. This shows that although moral emotions and moral reasoning might become increasingly coordinated over the course of development; the relation is complex and depends upon a variety of situational factors.

Research on children’s own experiences of moral conflicts provides another window into children’s emerging emotions and cognitions about morality. In these real-life contexts, children report mostly negatively valenced emotions, for moral reasons. In contrast, studies on judgments and emotion attributions about social exclusion indicate that while children and adolescents sometimes judge it wrong to exclude an out-group member for moral reasons, they still might attribute amoral emotions to excluder targets for reasons of group functioning. Thus, the relation between moral emotions and moral reasoning is multifaceted, reflecting the complexities involved in children’s experiences of everyday moral conflict.

Research that explains the role of emotions and reasoning in moral development highlights the ways in which each can be targeted to maximize the internalization of moral norms. An understanding of the interplay between moral emotions and moral reasoning has implications for best practices in parenting and education. To enhance children’s moral development, parents and educators should encourage children to talk about these emotions and integrate them into their interpretations of everyday moral conflict.

**Future Directions**

In summary, the emphasis placed on moral emotions and moral reasoning in the study of morality has been highlighted in recent theoretical and empirical developmental work, and promising first steps toward systematic integration of moral affect and moral cognition research have been taken. So far, most published studies have focused primarily on either negatively valenced moral emotions, such as guilt feelings attributed to hypothetical transgressors, or empathy/sympathy and the links between these emotions and moral reasoning. Given the importance of both negatively and positively valenced emotions in human morality, future research needs to investigate more systematically the development of various negative and positive moral emotions (e.g., shame, pride, moral outrage) in relation to moral reasoning, as each of these emotions may follow a distinct developmental trajectory and relate differentially to moral reasoning. Particularly moral outrage and compassion have not yet been frequently studied in the developmental literature (Malti & Latzko, 2012; Montada & Schneider, 1989).

Further research is also needed in order to better understand how different assessments of moral emotions (e.g., self-reports versus observation) may influence links to moral reasoning and how contextual features (e.g., moral transgression versus social exclusion) interact with normative developmental trajectories of various moral emotions and moral reasoning processes.

It also still remains unclear how social–cognitive development, such as an interpretive theory of mind or an understanding of second-order beliefs, influences the relationship between moral emotions and moral reasoning. Future studies using longitudinal designs will be useful to gain a deeper understanding of the role of theory of mind and perspective-taking skills in children’s emerging moral emotions and moral reasoning.
Finally, there is also a need for more research on judgments and emotion attributions about social exclusion to understand how children and adolescents balance group functioning and moral norms in everyday experiences of social exclusion and inclusion.

Understanding the multifaceted developmental relations between moral emotions and moral reasoning is not only important for theoretical reasons. More knowledge in these areas of developmental research has significant implications for the design of preventive interventions aimed at increasing care, intergroup tolerance, and social justice in children and adolescents.

References


The Development of Moral Emotions and Moral Reasoning


The Development of Moral Emotions and Moral Reasoning


Empathy-Related Responding
in Children

Nancy Eisenberg, Tracy L. Spinrad, and Amanda Morris

Foundations and Definitions

The constructs of empathy and sympathy have been discussed for many years by moral philosophers (e.g., Blum, 1980; Hume, 1748/1975). In addition, for decades, numerous psychologists have assigned empathy and sympathy a central role in moral development, especially as a factor that motivates prosocial behavior (i.e., voluntary behavior intended to benefit another) and inhibits aggression toward others (Batson, 1991; Feshbach, 1975; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988).

It is important to differentiate between empathy and related reactions (i.e., sympathy and personal distress)—reactions that often, but probably not always, stem from one’s initial empathic reaction to another. Empathy is defined as an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition and is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel in the given situation (e.g., feeling sad when viewing someone else who is sad; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). Many theorists agree that empathy must involve at least a modicum of self–other differentiation (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2006; Hoffman, 2000), such that the individual experiencing empathy is aware at some level that the emotion or emotion-eliciting context is associated with the other person, not the self. Sometimes empathy is the outcome of direct exposure to another’s emotion; at other times, an observer may make assumptions about another’s emotional state based on environmental cues or other information. For example, often people may experience empathy when they access stored information in memory about the effects of being in a particular situation (e.g., experiencing the death of a loved one) and/or when they mentally put themselves in the another’s situation (perspective taking; see Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 1991).

In contrast, sympathy is an emotional response stemming from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition, but it does not involve experiencing the same emotion as the other would be expected to experience; rather, sympathy consists of feelings of sorrow or concern for the other (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Although sympathy often is based upon empathy, it probably also can be generated directly from cognitive...
perspective taking or accessing information in memory that is relevant to the other's experience or situation (Eisenberg, Shea, et al., 1991).

We have argued that empathy also can lead to personal distress—a self-focused, aversive affective reaction to the apprehension of another's emotion (e.g., discomfort, anxiety; Batson, 1991). Personal distress often may stem from empathic overarousal—that is, high levels of vicariously induced aversive emotion (see Hoffman, 2000); however, it might also stem from other emotion-related processes (e.g., shame), from accessing relevant information in mental storage, or from cognitive perspective taking that results in an aversive emotional state (Eisenberg, Shea, et al., 1991). Henceforth, we use the term empathy-related responding to include empathy, sympathy, and personal distress, although we sometimes also discuss them separately.

Based on the aforementioned definitions of empathy-related responding, empathy is viewed as value-neutral (i.e., not systematically linked to morality or the lack thereof), sympathy as an emotional aspect of morality (because it is an important source of moral motivation), and personal distress as a reaction that typically leads to an egoistic orientation rather than an other-oriented, moral orientation. In other words, only sympathy is expected to reliably engender concern for others, and personal distress often precludes attending to others’ needs. However, because empathy often may produce sympathy, it likely is a precursor to sympathy and moral behavior in some contexts.

Thus, sympathy and sometimes empathy are viewed as fostering the development of other-oriented morality in children and as often providing the affective motivation for moral behavior. In this chapter, we discuss the development of empathy-related responding and its role in prosocial behavior, social competence, and adjustment. Then the role of self-regulation in the development of empathy is examined, as well as gender differences in empathy-related responding. Next we review research on the origins of empathy-related responding, including hereditary and environmental factors. We close with a brief discussion of implications and future research directions.

Theory and Research Regarding the Development of Empathy-Related Responding

Given space constraints, only theories most relevant to the development of empathy-related responding are reviewed. Hoffman (2000) proposed a theoretical model that delineates the role of infants’ self-awareness and self–other differentiation in the emergence of empathy. Hoffman outlined the developmental shift over time from self-concern in response to others’ distress to empathic concern for others that results in other-oriented prosocial behavior. Theories of moral reasoning also are relevant to empathy-related responding. However, some contend that Kohlberg’s (1969) justice-oriented model of moral reasoning does not sufficiently take into account care-related moral thinking, which is likely key in empathy-related responding. The focus of care-oriented or prosocial moral reasoning is on relationships, with motivation for moral behavior stemming from care rather than justice concerns. The majority of evidence suggests that moral reasoning is based on both care- and justice-oriented principles. Research conducted by Eisenberg and colleagues indicates that with age, there is an increase in school children’s other-oriented motives/goals.
Hoffman outlined the development of empathy from infancy into adulthood. In Hoffman’s first stage, newborns and infants display rudimentary empathic responses that are manifested as “global empathy.” This stage is defined by a period in which the young infant does not differentiate between the self and other (at least in regard to emotional states), and infants experience self-distress in response to others’ distress. The newborn’s reactive or contagious crying in response to the sound of another’s cry is viewed as a simple form, or precursor of, global empathy. Around the second year of life, the period of “egocentric empathy” emerges. The toddler is now viewed as capable of differentiating one’s own and others’ emotional responses and shows evidence of a rudimentary understanding of others’ emotions. Empathy at this stage differs from the previous stage because toddlers are more likely to respond with appropriate empathic affect.

The period of “empathy for another’s feelings” emerges with the rudimentary development of role-taking abilities as early as 2 to 3 years of age. According to Hoffman (2000), this stage marks the period in which children are increasingly aware of other people’s feelings and that other people’s perspectives may differ from their own. Thus, prosocial actions reflect an awareness of the other person’s needs. Moreover, with the development of language, children begin to empathize and sympathize with a wider range of emotions. Following the progression of global empathy to empathy for another’s feelings, Hoffman (2000) suggested that children begin to exhibit the ability to experience empathic responses even when the other person is not physically present (e.g., if they hear or read about someone in distress). By late childhood, with the emergence of greater cognitive maturity, children can empathize with another person’s general condition or plight. Further, children eventually understand the plight of an entire group or class of people and may respond empathically. Thus, Hoffman (2000) proposed that with increasing cognitive maturation, children are better able to respond with concern to others’ distress.

Consistent with Hoffman’s (2000) theory, there is evidence that newborns and infants display precursors of empathic responses that suggest a biological predisposition to empathy. Newborns have been found to cry in response to the cries of other infants (Simner, 1971) and to show more distress in response to another infant’s crying than their own (Dondi, Simion, & Caltran, 1999). However, some researchers have questioned the interpretation of these findings (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983); for example, infants may simply find a novel cry to be more aversive than their own cry.

Regardless, infants are responsive to others’ emotional signals. At 9 months of age, when mothers expressed sadness, infants displayed more negative emotional expressions and tended to avert their gaze away from their mothers. Conversely, infants expressed more joy when their mothers exhibited joy (Termine & Izard, 1988). In addition, children occasionally (albeit not frequently) exhibit some emotional and cognitive concern for others at 8 and 10 months of age (Roth-Hanania, Davidov, & Zahn-Waxler, 2011).

Early empathy-related responding has been associated with indices of cognitive development. Vaish, Carpenter, and Tomasello (2009) found that children showed concern for a stranger who was harmed as early as 18 months of age, even in the absence of expressed...
negative emotion (suggesting they inferred the other person’s emotional distress from the context), and concern was associated with attempts to help the stranger. Thus, relatively sophisticated social cognition is involved in even very early prosocial behaviors. Moreover, toddlers who display evidence of self-recognition (indicating a self–other distinction) tend to be relatively empathic/sympathetic and are likely to display prosocial behaviors (e.g., Johnson, 1982; Zahn-Waxler, Schiro, Robinson, Emde, & Schmitz, 2001), although it is possible that this pattern does not hold in cultures where relational goals are more important than individualistic goals (Kartner, Keller, & Chaudhary, 2010). Further, preschoolers’ hypothesis testing when they view an adult’s distress (e.g., attempts to label or understand another’s injury or source of pain, either verbally or in visual search patterns) has been positively related to their empathy/sympathy (Knafo, Zahn-Walker, Van Hulle, Robinson, & Rhee, 2008).

In the first years of life, there appears to be an increase in empathy and/or sympathy. For example, Zahn–Waxler and colleagues (Zahn–Waxler et al., 2001) found an increase from 14 to 36 months of age in facial, vocal, and gestural/postural expressions of concern when children viewed either their mother or an experimenter fake injuries (i.e., in the second year of life for reactions toward mother and into the third year of life for reactions to the stranger; Robinson, Zahn–Waxler, & Emde, 2001; also see Knafo et al., 2008; Liew et al., 2011). Self-distress in these contrived situations declined with age, particularly from 14 to 24 months (Zahn–Waxler et al., 2001). Van der Mark, Ijzendoorn, and Bakermans-Kranenburg (2002) also found an increase in empathy/prosocial responding (combined) from 16 to 22 months when toddlers’ mothers were distressed; however, unlike Robinson et al. (2001), they noted an age-related decline in reactions to strangers’ distress.

The general increase in empathy and/or sympathy appears to continue in the preschool and early school years. Phinney, Feshbach, and Farver (1986), for example, using observational procedures, found preschoolers exhibited relatively infrequent empathic reactions to crying peers, although older preschoolers responded prosocially (approached, commented, mediated [took action to remove the source of pain or conflict or lead the crying peer to the teacher] more often than did younger preschoolers. Moreover, empathic responses continue to involve more sophisticated perspective-taking skills with age in the elementary school years (e.g., Strayer & Roberts, 1997).

In an early review, Lennon and Eisenberg (1987) noted an age-related increase in self-report measures of empathy in the late preschool and elementary school years; it was not clear whether the age trend continued into adolescence. In a meta-analysis of studies after 1983 until about 1996, Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) found an age-related increase in empathy/sympathy across childhood and adolescence, at least for observational and self-report indexes (but not for solely facial or physiological indices). However, they did not examine when in childhood the age-related changes were most evident. Nonetheless, it is fairly clear that there are increases in self-reported empathy in the elementary school years (Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987), although not necessarily in sympathy across only a couple years of age (Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy et al., 1996). This developmental trend is probably due, at least in part, to age-related advances in children’s understanding of others’ feelings and thoughts, based partly on advances in perspective taking and in theory of mind (i.e., the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and to others and to understand that others’ beliefs, desires, and intentions can
differ from one’s own; see Eisenberg et al., 2006), as well as adults’ attempts to socialize children’s responses to such experiences.

Findings are mixed in regard to age-related changes in empathy-related reactions in adolescence. Using identical or similar measures, some researchers have found increases in sympathy (Davis & Franzoi, 1991; Olweus & Endresen, 1998) and a decline in personal distress during adolescence (Davis & Franzoi, 1991; Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy, & Shepard, 2005); others have not (Karniol, Gabay, Ochion, & Harari, 1998) or have found a mixed pattern of results (especially for empathic distress) varying by sex (Olweus & Endresen, 1998). Findings of change have been more evident in longitudinal rather than cross-sectional studies, especially those with larger sample sizes (e.g., Davis & Franzoi, 1991).

Unfortunately, nearly all of the existing relevant data with older children and adolescents are self-reported (e.g., reports after observing others in pain or need or responses to questionnaires assessing dispositional empathy/sympathy), so it is not clear whether measures of empathy-related responding that are not self-reported would change with age. Indeed, there is some evidence that empathy, assessed in terms of observed facial reactions to events befalling another, declines with age, perhaps due to masking of displays of emotion, whereas self-reported empathy with others’ negative emotions increases with age (e.g., Zhou et al., 2002). Moreover, studies of adolescents have usually assessed dispositional empathy-related responding, so little is known about differences in the context that might affect changes with age in such responding. Nonetheless, it appears that empathy-related responding changes in its quality in the early years, and the capacity for sympathy continues to develop during the elementary school years, and perhaps thereafter.

Current Research Themes

The Relation of Empathy-Related Responding to Prosocial Tendencies

As previously noted, numerous theorists have hypothesized that individuals who are prone to empathy and sympathy are more likely than their less empathic or sympathetic peers to act in prosocial ways (e.g., Hoffman, 2000; Eisenberg, 1986). Batson (1991) argued that sympathy is associated with the desire to reduce another person’s distress or need and therefore is likely to cause altruistically motivated (but not egoistically motivated) behavior. In addition, some theorists have viewed sympathy as contributing to the development and elicitation of higher-level moral reasoning, which is associated with sympathy (e.g., Eisenberg, 1986; Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001; Hoffman, 2000). Empathy and sympathy can direct attention to others’ needs and engender feelings of concern for others in pain, need, or distress; moreover, empathy and sympathy may reorganize ways of thinking about others’ needs and the effects of one’s behavior on others (Hoffman, 2000). Thus, empathy and sympathy are believed to contribute to an orientation toward others’ feelings and needs that is incorporated in moral reasoning and reflected in social behavior (Eisenberg, 1986; Hoffman, 2000).

In contrast to sympathy, Batson proposed that because personal distress is experienced as aversive, it is associated with the motivation to reduce one’s own distress. Thus, people who experience personal distress are expected to escape from contact with the needy or distressed
other, if possible, and to assist only when doing so is the easiest way to alleviate their own distress.

Whether a behavior is moral or not depends on its motivation. Prosocial behavior can be motivated by many factors, including the desire for reciprocity, rewards, or approval; the desire to uphold internalized values; or concern for another. Only those prosocial behaviors deemed altruistic—that is, motivated by other-oriented moral concerns (e.g., duty) or emotion rather than egoistic or pragmatic concerns—generally are viewed as moral in the philosophical sense (although prosocial behaviors performed for approval, for example, are often deemed socially desirable; Eisenberg et al., 2006). Thus, sympathy (but not personal distress) is believed to be a common motive for other-oriented, selfless altruistic actions (e.g., Batson, 1991; Eisenberg, 1986).

Although early studies of the relation between empathy-related responding and prosocial behavior often did not obtain significant associations (see Underwood & Moore, 1982), recent research involving more evocative stimuli and different measures generally has found an association. Most of the early studies on children’s empathy involved the use of picture-story measures of empathy in which children were told very short stories about emotional events (e.g., a child who lost his/her dog) and were asked how they felt after hearing each story. There is reason to believe that this measure tapped children’s inclination to provide the desired or socially appropriate response more than children’s actual empathic emotion (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Eisenberg-Berg & Lennon, 1980). In fact, in a meta-analytic investigation in which picture–story measures were examined separately from other indices of empathy, such measures were unrelated to children’s prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Moreover, younger children’s self-reported empathy (or sympathy) toward others in experimental settings (e.g., after viewing a videotape of distressed or needy others) often has been only weakly positively related or unrelated to their helping and sharing with others in need or distress (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990), probably because young children have difficulty assessing or reporting their emotional reactions.

In contrast, when investigators have used facial indices or physiological indices with children, self-report questionnaires with older children and adults, adults’ reports, and children’s reports of reactions to experimental manipulations to assess empathy or sympathy, they tend to find a significant positive association between empathy or sympathy, especially the latter, and a variety of measures of prosocial behavior (see Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Eisenberg et al., 2006). For example, Zahn-Waxler and her colleagues found that observed sympathetic concern and prosocial behavior (often measured in response to another in pain or distress) co-occur even in the first to second year of life (Knafo et al., 2008; Roth-Hanania et al., 2011; Young, Fox, & Zahn-Waxler, 1999), as well as in early childhood (e.g., Zahn–Waxler et al., 1995). Moreover, in a number of studies, a variety of measures of children’s prosocial behavior have been associated with facial measures of concern and physiological measures of sympathy when children view needy or distressed others in videotapes (see Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Eisenberg et al., 2006). The association between sympathy and prosocial behaviors has been noted in numerous countries and subcultures (Carlo, Knight, McGinley, & Hayes, 2011; Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2010; Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2000; Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe, 2008; Malti, Gummerman, Keller, & Buchmann, 2009; Trommsdorff, Friedlmair, & Mayer, 2007). As might be expected if sympathy fosters altruism, Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen,
and Randall (2003) found that adolescents’ self-reported sympathy was more strongly related to reported need-related or altruistic prosocial behaviors than to prosocial behaviors performed publicly (presumably often for approval). Nonetheless, findings often have been modest in strength, and significant relations often have not been obtained with all measures (see Eisenberg et al., 2006). It is likely that some of the inconsistency in findings is due not only to the type of measure of empathy-related responding, but also to the fact that empathy, rather than sympathy, was assessed in some studies. Moreover, sometimes the measure of empathy/sympathy may not have been evocative or the measure of prosocial behavior included nonaltruistic actions, which would not be expected to relate consistently to sympathy (or empathy).

In contrast to relations with empathy or sympathy, reported or observed personal distress reactions appear to be unrelated, or negatively related, to children’s prosocial behaviors (e.g., Carlo et al., 2003; Eisenberg et al., 1995; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1999; Zahn–Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992; see Eisenberg et al., 2006). For example, higher levels of skin conductance during exposure to an evocative empathy stimulus—viewed as an index of distress—sometimes have been correlated with lower levels of prosocial behavior or personal distress (Fabes, Eisenberg & Eisenbud, 1993; Fabes et al., 1994; cf. Zahn-Waxler et al., 1995). In addition, increases in heart rate when viewing others in an evocative context—which seems to reflect personal distress—have been related to lower levels of children’s prosocial behavior (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1989; see Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990, and Eisenberg et al., 2006, for reviews). Thus, sympathy and personal distress do appear to be differentially related to children’s prosocial behavior.

The Relation of Empathy-Related Responding With Social Competence and Adjustment

The process of empathizing with another would be expected to increase the likelihood of a child understanding another person’s feelings and responding in a sensitive manner. Similarly, if children experience sympathetic concern, then they are likely to be motivated to behave in a prosocial manner. Thus, there is a natural conceptual link between empathy or sympathy and social competence. Conversely, children who tend to become highly aroused (with negative emotion) when exposed to others’ emotions would be expected to become self-focused or dysregulated in their social behavior (Batson, 1991); consequently, personal distress would be expected to relate to low social competence.

Consistent with these arguments, Eisenberg and Miller’s (1987) meta-analysis found a positive, albeit weak, association between measures of empathy-related responding and diverse measures of social competence. However, at that time, relevant data were limited, and many of the studies used the problematic picture–story measure of empathy. In more recent studies, children’s dispositional or situational empathy and sympathy have been correlated with a variety of measures of social competence, including peer sociometric status, adults’ reports of children’s socially appropriate behaviors, self-reported agreeableness, and children’s enacted responses (with puppets) to various hypothetical social conflicts with peers, concurrently and 2 years prior; (Adams, 1983; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1995; Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, et al., 1996; Sallquist, Eisenberg, Spinrad, Eggum, & Gaertner, 2009; Zhou et al., 2002). In addition, empathy/sympathy and prosocial behavior have been associated
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with children’s perspective taking (e.g., Carlo, Knight, McGinley, Goodvin, & Roesch, 2010; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Roberts & Strayer, 1996), which would be expected to foster social competence. In a longitudinal study, such relations often held over 2 to 6 years during elementary school (Murphy et al., 1999). Similar concurrent relations between adult-reported dispositional sympathy and peer- and adult-reported social competence and popularity have been found for Indonesian third graders (Eisenberg, Liew, & Pidada, 2001).

Children’s aggressive tendencies also have been negatively correlated with situational measures of empathy-related responding, but not until about 6 years of age. Gill and Calkins (2003) found that 2-year olds’ concerned or empathic responding to an experimenter feigning an injury and to a tape of a crying infant was higher for children with externalizing problems. In addition, they found that aggressive children were physiologically less regulated (on an index of vagal tone). Gill and Calkins suggested that the aggressive children were more prone to empathic overarousal (overly high levels of empathy that are likely to be dysregulating) and that regulated children might distract themselves or otherwise regulate their empathic arousal when the needy people were strangers. Moreover, in a study of 5-year olds, empathic/prosocial reactions were positively related to aggression (Kienbaum, 2001), whereas in another study, empathy was linked to lower levels of problem behaviors at age 6–7 but not 4–5 (Hastings et al., 2000; also see Lovett & Sheffield, 2007 and Zahn-Waxler et al., 1995). In young children, aggressiveness also is sometimes positively related with prosocial behavior (see Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). It is possible that aggressive children are more assertive and are thus more likely to approach others and attend to their needs. Because most studies of empathy with young children have assessed attention to and responses to someone who is hurt, interpersonal style (e.g., inhibition) likely influences most of the findings (e.g., Young et al., 1999).

In contrast to findings with young children, aggression, bullying, and related externalizing problems tend to be negatively related to empathy/sympathy in children about 6 years and older (e.g., Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Mayberry & Espelage, 2007; Strayer & Roberts, 2004; Warden & Mackinnon, 2003). Hastings et al. (2000) found that 4- to 5-year olds with behavior problems (including externalizing) declined in their levels of observed concern and adult- or child-reported concern/empathy by age 6 to 7 years. In addition, greater concern for others at 4 to 5 years of age predicted a decrease in the stability and severity of problem behaviors (including externalizing problems) 2 years later, and concern at 6 to 7 years of age predicted decreases in the stability of problem behaviors at 9 to 10 years old. Zhou et al. (2002) found that schoolchildren’s situational facial and reported empathy when viewing slides depicting others experiencing negative emotion or in negative situations was related to low problem behavior, even when controlling for level of empathy 2 years before.

Studies of bullying indicate that low levels of empathy are associated with greater bullying behavior, and this is particularly the case among boys (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe, 2007; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011; Stavriniades, Georgiou, & Theofanous, 2010). In contrast, Barchia and Bussey (2011) found that high levels of empathy are associated with greater defending behavior toward victims of bullying over time, but only among girls. Research also indicates that psychopaths, or people with psychopathic, callous–unemotional traits, are less physiologically responsive to emotion-inducing stimuli (often mildly evocative slides) and to cues of others’ distress than are nonpsychopaths (Anastassou–Hadjicharalambous
& Warden, 2008; Sutton, Vitale, & Newman, 2002; also see Hastings et al., 2000). Thus, the lack of empathy (perhaps based on lack of perspective taking and, in young children, lack of theory of mind) may contribute to problems in socioemotional development and may contribute to bullying behavior.

**Empathy-Related Responding and Emotion Regulation**

As already noted, personal distress is believed to frequently stem from empathic overarousal—feelings of empathy that are so arousing that they are experienced as aversive—whereas individuals who experience sympathy appear to be affectively aroused, but not to a level that is distressing enough to evoke a self-focus (Eisenberg et al., 1996). Thus, whether children and adults can manage their empathic reactions in specific contexts may affect their tendency to experience sympathy or personal distress. Moreover, individuals who are better regulated in general (i.e., dispositionally) would be predicted to be prone to sympathy, whereas those who are low in regulation would be expected to be predisposed to experience personal distress.

Researchers seldom have assessed individuals’ regulation of emotion in a given setting and their empathy-related responding in the same setting. However, psychophysiological data support the prediction that people in situations likely to elicit a reaction akin to personal distress are more aroused than when they are exposed to sympathy-inducing situations (via videotapes or recall of real-life events; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Eisenberg, Fabes, et al., 1988; Eisenberg, Schaller et al., 1988). The fact that arousal differs in the two situations does not necessarily indicate that regulation also differs; however, it suggests that personal distress involves higher levels of arousal than sympathy and that this arousal is probably somewhat less modulated by regulatory activities.

There is considerably more research pertaining to the relation of dispositional regulation (i.e., relatively stable individual differences in regulation) to individual differences in empathy-related responding (either in specific situations or dispositional sympathy/empathy), at least after the first few years of life. There appears to be a modest positive relation between markers of children’s sympathetic responding in specific situations and their dispositional regulation. For example, Eisenberg and Fabes (1995) found that children who displayed concerned facial reactions to a sympathy-inducing film were relatively high in regulated attention and low in unregulated coping behaviors. Similarly, Guthrie et al. (1997) found modest positive relations between adults’ reports of children’s attentional regulation and facial and physiological markers of sympathetic responding to an empathy-inducing film.

Further, children’s, parents’, and teachers’ reports of children’s dispositional sympathy have been associated with adults’ (parents’ or teachers’) reports of children’s abilities to regulate their attention or emotion-induced behavior (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2007; Eisenberg, Fabes, et al., 1996, 1998; Eisenberg, Liew, et al., 2001; Murphy, Shepard, Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1999; Valiente et al., 2004; Veenstra et al., 2008). In a longitudinal study, Eisenberg et al. (2007) found that both self-regulation in the early school years and the slope of change in self-regulation predicted adolescents’ teacher- and/or parent-reported sympathy 6 to 8 years later. In addition, in the same study, behavioral measures of regulation were sometimes significantly positively correlated with adult- or child-reported sympathy.
In contrast to sympathy, there is evidence that personal distress reactions are negatively related to regulation (Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1999; Ungerer et al., 1990). For example, Guthrie et al. (1997) found that adults viewed children who exhibited heart rate (HR) acceleration (versus deceleration) in response to an empathy-inducing film as relatively unregulated. Furthermore, Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, et al. (1996) found that HR acceleration in response to a distressing film clip was related to self-reports and teachers’ reports of low dispositional sympathy for boys (but not girls). Valiente et al. (2004) reported that parent-reported and observed (combined) self-regulation was negatively related to child-reported personal distress when viewing an empathy-inducing film. Thus, overall, there is some evidence that regulatory processes are involved in whether individuals experience sympathy or personal distress, although much of the relevant data are correlational and cannot prove a causal relation.

Sex Differences in Empathy-Related Responding

A commonly held gender stereotype is that females are significantly more empathic and sympathetic than males (e.g., Martin, 1987). Yet, the strength of empirical evidence to bolster this belief about children is mixed. Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) and Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) drew attention to the discrepancy between public perception and empirical data on sex differences in children’s sympathy and empathy through meta-analyses of extant work. Corresponding effect sizes were inconsistent across studies; empirical support for such sex differences ranged from small to overwhelmingly large. Eisenberg and colleagues speculated the range of effect sizes might be due to the specific method used to assess children’s sympathy and empathy and the meta-analytic results support this supposition. The largest sex divergences and effect sizes were found for self-report measures of empathy and sympathy, which are one of the most popular means of assessment. More recent research using self-report assessments also typically supports this premise, indicating that girls report greater empathy and sympathy than do boys (e.g., Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001; Karniol et al., 1998; Olweus & Endresen, 1998). Similarly, investigators who rely on others (e.g., parents and teachers) to rate children’s levels of empathy/sympathy typically find raters attribute higher levels to females than to males (Hastings et al., 2000; Murphy et al., 1999; see Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983, for reviews). Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) suggested the use of self-reports might invoke demand characteristics because children may be aware of what is being assessed (i.e., sympathy or empathy) and attempt to provide responses in line with prevailing gender stereotypes. Moreover, adult raters may be influenced by stereotypes regarding sex differences in empathy/sympathy.

In recent studies, investigators have tended to tap empathy and sympathy through the use of evocative films, slides, or puppet shows. Researchers using these procedures and results from a meta-analysis (conducted by Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998) have found some sex differences in behavioral and facial reactions favoring females (Hastings et al., 2000; Strayer & Roberts, 1997; Volbrecht, Lemery-Chalfant, Zahn-Waxler, Askan, & Goldsmith, 2007; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992; Zhou et al., 2002), although this has not always been the case (see Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, & Miller, 1989; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983). In contrast, investigators have found few sex differences in physiological responses to such evocative
stimuli (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Guthrie et al., 1997), perhaps because physiological responses can reflect a variety of underlying reactions well beyond sympathy and empathy.

**Heredity**

Researchers using behavioral genetics twin studies generally have found evidence of both shared genetic and shared environmental effects (as well as nonshared environmental effects) for children's observed empathic concern, often assessed when children viewed someone in pain or distress, at least at a younger age (e.g., Knafo et al., 2008; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2001). However, Knafo et al. (2009) reported no effect of heredity in a study of Israeli 44-month olds' empathy toward an examiner simulating pain. Shared environmental effects have been found to decrease from the first year or two into the preschool (Knafo et al., 2008) or elementary school (Knafo & Plomin, 2006) years, whereas genetic effects appear to increase. Knafo and colleagues (Knafo & Plomin, 2006; Knafo et al., 2008) found that shared environmental influences predicted stability, but less so with age, whereas nonshared environmental influences contributed primarily to change. Genetic effects also appear to contribute to the continuity of empathy-related responding, although Knafo, et al. (2008) found that new genetic effects emerged at 20 to 36 months (especially between 20 and 24 months). We know of little molecular genetics work predicting children's empathy or sympathy. However, Knafo, Israel, and Ebstein (2011) found a gene X environment interaction: Positive parenting related to mother-reported prosocial behavior, and parental unexplained punishment related to more self-initiated prosocial behavior, but only among children carrying the 7-repeat DRD4 allele (a polymorphism on a gene that affects the dopamine receptor). Thus, it is likely that DRD4 plays some role in empathy-related responding.

**Socialization of Empathy-Related Responding**

Despite some genetic transmission of empathy, it is likely that environmental factors, including interactions with caregivers, can either promote or inhibit the development of sympathy and personal distress. Parents' socialization practices often may partly reflect parents' genetic makeup, which is passed on to offspring and may affect children's capacity for empathy, but some empathy-related behavior is likely learned.

**Family Similarities**

Similarities between parents' and children's empathy-related responding have been found. For example, when mothers are high on sympathy, their daughters tend to display low levels of personal distress and high levels of sympathy (Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991; Eisenberg et al., 1992; Eisenberg & McNally, 1993; Fabes, Eisenber, & Miller, 1990). Mothers' sympathy usually has not been related with their sons' sympathy (although a positive relation was found by Eisenberg et al., 1992), whereas fathers' sympathy has been related to sons' sympathy (Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991). It is possible that individual differences in parents' sympathy caused differences in same-sex children's sympathy, but it is also plausible that genetic factors were partly responsible for the similarity in sympathy. However, the fact that the association is within-gender seems
Empathy-Related Responding in Children

to argue against a genetic explanation, unless genes related to empathy are carried on the sex chromosomes. Perhaps children are more likely to imitate sympathy in same-sex parents or be influenced by their teaching in regard to an other-orientation.

In contrast, the relation between parents’ empathy (rather than sympathy and personal distress and children’s empathy-related responding) is less consistent, with some investigators finding a relation (Trommsdorff, 1991) and others finding either little association (Kalliopuska, 1984; Strayer & Roberts, 1989), or a complex pattern of relations (Barnett, King, Howard, & Dino, 1980). In one study in which mothers and children watched an empathy-inducing film together, mothers who exhibited high facial distress and heart rate acceleration during a distressing film had children who also did so (Eisenberg et al., 1992). Interestingly, Tucker, Updegraff, McHale, and Crouter (1999) found that 10- to 12-year olds’ empathy was positively related to their younger sisters’ (2–3 years younger) empathy, whereas older brothers’ (but not sisters’) empathy was related to younger brothers’ empathy. The author posited that younger siblings might model or identify with older siblings.

The Quality of the Parent–Child Relationship and Children’s Empathy-Related Responding

In general, sympathy (and sometimes empathy) has been linked to a high-quality relationship with the caregiving parent. Children with secure attachments may attend to and want to please their parents (Waters, Hay, & Richters, 1986), which may facilitate parental attempts to foster empathy and sympathy. Moreover, the quality of parent–child relationships is important to the development of a sense of connection to others and positive valuing of other people—characteristics likely to foster sympathetic responding (Staub, 1992). Indeed, although the findings have not been entirely consistent or sometimes have involved complex, moderated relations (e.g., Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, Richardson, Susman, & Martinez, 1994), children who are securely attached tend to display more empathic concern toward an injured stranger as toddlers (van der Mark et al., 2002), and are relatively sympathetic and prosocial (often these variables were not differentiated) at ages 3 to 4 (Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989). In addition, researchers have found that parent–adolescent relationship quality predicts youths’ empathy-related responding (Laible, Carlo & Roesch, 2004).

Consistent with attachment theory, maternal responsiveness (i.e., contingent responding) in infancy also has been found to predict later empathic responding (Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Kiang, Moreno, & Robinson, 2004; Moreno, Klute, & Robinson, 2008). For example, in one study, maternal sensitivity at 10 months predicted concerned awareness (an index of sympathy) in response to adults’ feigned distress at 18 months of age (Spinrad & Stifter, 2006). Similarly, Feldman (2007a, 2007b) found that infant–mother synchrony in the first year of life predicted empathy in adolescence.

Although findings are less consistent, some investigators have found a positive relation of children’s or adolescents’ empathy or sympathy and warm, empathic parenting (Trommsdorff, 1991; Robinson, Zahn-Walker, & Emde, 1994; Zhou et al., 2002), parental affection, or nurturance (Krevans & Gibbs, 1996), whereas others have not (e.g., Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991; Janssens & Gerris, 1992; also see van der Mark et al., 2002). In other cases, findings were mixed (e.g., Zhou et al., 2002). Although Bryant (1987) found no relation between general parental support and empathy
for 7- and 10-year olds, maternal report of expressions of support during times of stress predicted children’s empathy. Thus, maternal support when children are under stress may foster empathy more than overall levels of maternal warmth.

In addition, warm relationships with other family members, adults, and peers also may contribute to children’s empathy/sympathy. That is, children’s warm relationships with grandparents (Bryant, 1987), older siblings (Tucker et al., 1999), teachers (Donohue, Perry, & Weinstein, 2003), and peers (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000; Laible et al., 2004) have been associated with their empathy and/or sympathy. For example, in one study, adolescents who had close, secure relationships with both parents and peers viewed themselves as more sympathetic than did adolescents who had low levels of security with both peers and parents (Laible et al., 2000).

Relations of Parental Disciplinary Practices to Children’s Empathy-Related Responding

Findings regarding links between disciplinary practices and empathy are somewhat inconsistent, perhaps in part because sympathy and personal distress seldom have been differentiated in this research (e.g., Barnett et al., 1980). Nonetheless, some investigators have found a positive association between inductive practices (e.g., parental use of reasoning) and children’s empathy/sympathy (e.g., Janssens & Gerris, 1992; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; see Eisenberg et al., 2006; Laible, Eye, & Carlo, 2008). Hoffman (2000) argued that inductions orient children to the needs of others in a manner so that children pay attention and process the information but do not become overly aroused. On the other hand, harsh parental control seems to be negatively related to sympathy or positively related to personal distress. In studies of empathy, parents’ use of power assertion has been negatively related (Janssens & Gerris, 1992; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996) or unrelated (Bryant, 1987; Feshbach, 1975) to children’s empathy, and the use of corporal punishment and low use of inductions during childhood were associated with low empathy in a sample of undergraduate college students (Lopez, Bonenberger, & Schneider, 2001). Moreover, parental demandingness (i.e., expectations of mature behavior) and limit setting have been positively related to their children’s empathy (Bryant, 1987; Janssens & Gerris, 1992; also see Krevans & Gibbs, 1996), whereas paternal (but not maternal) indulgence has predicted low levels of empathy for boys (findings were mixed for girls; Bryant, 1987). Consistent with a number of the aforementioned findings, Hastings et al. (2002) found authoritarian parenting minus authoritative parenting was negatively related to children’s concern for others and empathy and positively related to disregard for others at age 7. However, when the children were 5 years old, this index of parenting related only with low empathy (and not with concern). Thus, although the data are not highly consistent, the general pattern of findings suggests that parents who use reasoning for discipline, set high standards for their children, and are not overly derogatory or punitive are relatively likely to raise empathic (or perhaps sympathetic) children.

Parental Emotion-Related Disciplinary Practices

In general, parental practices that promote children’s ability to deal constructively with their own negative emotion seem to foster sympathy rather than personal distress. This
result may be due to the notion that children who cannot adequately cope with their emotions tend to become overaroused and, thus, experience a self-focused reaction (i.e., personal distress) to others’ distress or need.

Parents who are strict with regard to children’s expression of emotion may deny them opportunities for learning about feelings and their regulation (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997). Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, and Miller (1991) found that parents’ reports of restrictiveness in response to children’s expression of emotions such as anxiety and sadness in a variety of contexts were positively correlated with facial and physiological markers of boys’ (but not girls’) distress when viewing a sympathy-inducing film, accompanied by self-reports of low distress in reaction to the film. Thus, sons of restrictive parents seemed prone to experience distress when confronted with others’ distress, but either denied or did not acknowledge to themselves what they were feeling.

However, it is important to note that the effect of parental restrictiveness may vary with both the situation in which the emotion is expressed and the age of the child. Parents who discouraged their same-sex elementary school children from expressing emotions that would be hurtful to others had children high in self-reported sympathy (Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991). However, restrictiveness in regard to the display of hurtful emotions was associated with high levels of personal distress in younger (kindergarten) girls (but not boys). Mothers of these girls appeared less supportive in general, and their restrictiveness may have reflected age-inappropriate restrictiveness or low levels of support (Eisenberg et al., 1992).

Parents also teach children ways to deal with their negative emotions. One constructive mode of coping with emotional stress is acting directly upon the problem, that is, trying to change factors in the environment that have caused the distress (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001). Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, and Miller (1991) found that boys (but not girls) whose parents encouraged them to deal instrumentally with situations causing their own sadness or anxiety were more likely to exhibit markers of sympathy rather than personal distress in empathy-inducing contexts. Boys who are able to modulate their negative emotions in this way may be better able than other boys to regulate their empathic arousal and, consequently, more likely to experience sympathy. However, Eisenberg et al. (1993) did not find that mothers’ reports of using problem solving when their children were distressed or anxious were related with their children’s facial distress and heart rate response to a crying baby (although it did relate to greater helping).

Maternal behaviors in ongoing evocative situations (not involving discipline) that direct children’s attention to another’s situation and/or help children to feel another’s distress also have been associated with sympathy (Fabes, Eisenberg, Karbon, Bernzweig, et al., 1994). For example, mothers’ references to their own sympathy and sadness and their attempts to induce perspective taking or highlight another’s feelings or situation have been associated with boys’ reports of sympathy and sadness (Eisenberg, Fabes, Carlo, Troyer et al., 1992). Findings are mixed in regard to whether the mere labeling or discussion of emotions fosters empathic or sympathetic tendencies (e.g., Barnett et al., 1980; Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst & Wilinson, 2007; Garner, 2003). Belden, Kuebli, Pauley, and Kindleberger (2003) found that mothers’ questions about their children’s emotional reactions, states or mind, or interpretations about the motivation for a good
deed performed by their child in the past were positively correlated with children’s self-reported empathy, whereas others have found no relations between discussion of emotion and children’s empathy (also see Eisenberg et al., 1993; Eisenberg, Losoya et al., 2001). Similarly, Fabes, Eisenberg, Karbon, Bernzweig, et al. (1994) found no relation between mothers’ actual use of emotion terms when viewing evocative films and children’s sympathy; however, the degree to which mothers were warm and directed their children’s attention to the emotional content of the film was positively related to markers of children’s sympathy, and negatively related to markers of personal distress, in second graders but not kindergartners. Parental discussion of emotion may be associated with children’s sympathy primarily when such discussion fosters perspective taking and an understanding of emotion (see Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991; Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991), and when such discussion occurs in everyday interactions that are not characterized by either conflict or a high degree of parental anger in response to children’s behavior (Dunn & Brown, 1994). Moreover, parental discussion of emotion appears to be associated with children’s regulation (Gottman et al., 1997), which may indirectly promote sympathy.

Frequent parental expression of emotions that are neither hurtful nor hostile in view of children (albeit not necessarily directed at them) also may encourage children to experience others’ emotions (Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Miller et al., 1991; Michalik et al., 2007; Valiente et al., 2004; Zhou et al., 2002). For example, the expression of soft, nonassertive negative emotions in the home has been positively associated with girls’ (especially younger girls’) sympathy. In contrast, both boys and girls from homes in which hostile negative emotions frequently are expressed seem to be prone to personal distress (Eisenberg et al., 1992). Parental positive expressivity has been positively related to sympathy in elementary school and adolescence (Michalik et al., 2007), and Hastings et al. (2002) found that parental report of their own negative affect (i.e., anger, disappointment, and conflict) in interactions with their children was negatively related to children’s empathy (but not concern) at 7 years of age (but no significant relations were obtained at age 5). It is likely that degree and quality of family expressiveness not only reflects the quality of family interactions, but also teaches children what emotions, and how much emotion, they are expected to display and/or experience and how to regulate their emotions (Gottman et al., 1997; see Halberstadt, Crisp, & Eaton, 1999).

Moreover, the relation of parental assertive negative expressivity to children’s empathy-related responding appears to be moderated by children’s level of dispositional negative regulation. For example, Valiente et al. (2004) found that exposure to moderate levels of parents’ negative expressivity was linked to high sympathy only for children high in effortful control. For children low in effortful control, personal distress was relatively high regardless of the level of parental expression of negative emotion, whereas parental negative expressivity was positively related to personal distress for children high in effortful control.

Of course, cultures differ in the degree to which they value the direct expression of emotion and encourage children to express their emotions (e.g., Zahn–Waxler, Friedman, Cole, Mizuta, & Hiruma, 1996). Thus, relations between parental expressivity and children’s empathy and sympathy may vary across cultures. For example, Eisenberg, Liew et al., (2001) found that parents’ (primarily mothers’) reported expression of positive emotions was positively related to American, but not Indonesian, children’s sympathy. In
contrast, parent-reported expression of negative emotions was more consistently negatively related with adults’ reports of Indonesian children’s sympathy. In Indonesia, the experience or overt expression of intense emotions—positive or negative—tends to be discouraged because it is believed to undermine social relationships and to cause illnesses (e.g., Mulder, 1996; Wellenkamp, 1995). The devaluing of emotionality in Java might account for the different pattern of relations in the two cultures.

The findings already reviewed generally support the view that children’s tendencies to respond with sympathy versus personal distress are in part learned, although many factors may moderate the effectiveness of socialization, and genetic factors often may be involved in the process. Moreover, it is important to consider potential bidirectional relations between parents and children in the socialization process.

Implications and New Directions

Knowledge of the development and correlates of children’s empathy and sympathy has grown considerably in the past 3 decades. Clearly, empathy and/or sympathy are linked to important domains of children’s functioning, such as their prosocial behavior, emotion regulation, and adjustment. In addition, it seems likely that socialization, as well as heredity, contribute to individual and sex differences in empathy–related responding. Moreover, although not discussed in detail in this chapter, sympathy has been associated with higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning (Eisenberg, 1986; Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001). However, in much of the research, measures of empathy, sympathy, and even prosocial behavior are not clearly differentiated (or are combined), especially in studies of young children. This lack of differentiation likely contributes to the inconsistencies across studies. Moreover, observational measures of constructs have often been used to study empathy–related responding in young children, whereas self- or other-reports have been used to assess empathy/sympathy in older children and adolescents. Thus, differences in findings, as well as some of the findings in regard to age trends, could be partly due to methodological variations across age groups. Furthermore, there are few longitudinal or genetically informed studies of empathy and sympathy, so it is especially difficult to draw causal conclusions about the role of socialization in its development or the impact of gene–by–environment interactions in understanding empathy–related responding. An area in which there undoubtedly will be a spate of new studies in the near future is work on gene–by–environment interactions when predicting empathy–related responding.

One new trend in research is the neuroimaging of empathy and sympathy using functional MRI in both children and adults (see Farrow, 2007; Light et al., 2009). With advances in technology over the past several decades, children are now able to participate in neuroimaging studies, and research is emerging on the neurophysiological basis of empathy. In such studies, participants are presented evocative stimuli such as films of painful situations. Developmental patterns have been identified using such techniques, and this is a promising venue for future research (e.g., Decety & Michalska, 2010). For example, neuroscience research can provide information on the role of emotional systems linked to empathy–related responding and the involvement of portions of the brain in perspective taking and other cognitive processes. Findings from neuroimaging may also lead to a
greater understanding of deficits in empathy and the role of empathy, or a lack of empathy, in psychopathology.

In future studies, it will be important to differentiate among empathy, sympathy, and personal distress so their differential relations to socioemotional functioning and socialization can be further elaborated. In addition, it would be useful to delineate in greater detail the causal relations and processes that mediate and moderate the relations observed in the literature. For example, information on how children’s affective and cognitive processing in socialization encounters mediates the relations of parental socialization practices to empathy-related responding is needed. Further, the ways in which children’s temperament moderates the effectiveness of parental practices that appear to foster empathy or sympathy merit greater attention. Finally, more attention to context is needed. Relatively little is known about situational variables that stimulate or evoke empathy and sympathy and the conditions under which children are likely to experience personal distress. Nor is there much research on cultural differences in the origins and correlates of empathy-related responding. Empathy and sympathy likely are less valued in some cultures than others, and socialization practices that promote empathy-related responding likely differ depending on how much empathy and emotionality more generally are valued. Finally, the role of empathy and sympathy in other aspects of morality besides prosocial or aggressive behavior (e.g., conscience, moral reasoning) is an issue for future research. Because of the role of empathy and sympathy in so many aspects of children’s moral and social functioning, including the quality of their social relationships and interactions (Eisenberg et al., 2006), an understanding of the development of empathy-related responding is relevant to interventions designed to improve children’s moral and social functioning. Indeed, examining empathy and its development provides insight into the role of emotions in social relationships, and provides a foundation for understanding moral, altruistic behavior.

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References


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Foundations and Definitional Issues

A casual glance at current news and events in different societies might lead us to believe that most children and youth are aggressive and selfish. There appears to be a social epidemic of hurtful and harmful behaviors among our youth. On any given day, relatively very few instances of kindness, helpfulness, and generosity are portrayed in the mass media. However, common sense tells us that most children are basically good and helpful. Most of us know firsthand about the many acts of benevolence and kindness that children and youth exhibit. What are the origins of these positive traits? What are the different behavioral manifestations of these traits? And how are they maintained, fostered, or promoted through life?

The roots of interest in prosocial behaviors (i.e., acts intended to benefit others; Carlo, 2006; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006; Staub, 1979) can be traced back to scholarly writings of many early religious scholars and philosophers. In religions, the value of such human practices (e.g., selflessness, sharing, reducing suffering in others) is exemplified in the characteristics endowed in the gods (e.g., Allah, God) of most major religions (e.g., Islam, Judaism, Christianity). Buddhism and Hinduism also strongly espouse the promotion of empathy, consideration of the needs of others, and altruism. Major figures (e.g., Jesus, Mohammad, Confucius) in religious writings are also personified as selfless and generous individuals whose prosocial actions are deemed virtuous and heroic. Similarly, the nature of humans—namely their altruistic and prosocial tendencies—was often the topic of lively philosophical debates and scholarship (e.g., Hume, 1751/1957; Kant, 1785/1993). One of the best known and most influential advocates for the selfless nature of humans was David Hume. Hume asserted that humans have an intrinsic capacity for compassion and sympathy, which is the primary motivator for benevolent and altruistic human actions. In his view, sympathy and compassion formed the primary, though not the only, basis for human morality. Without sympathy, morality is “cold” and meaningless. His emotivist perspective provided an antidote to other philosophers (e.g., Kant, 1785/1993) who championed the role of rationality and cognitive processes in defining morality.
However, much of the early psychological research on moral development (including prosocial development) was influenced greatly by the work of rationalists such as Kant. This strong rationalist tradition continues in many contemporary models of prosocial and moral development. In recent years, however, philosophers (such as Blum, 1980) have reified the views of Hume and other emotivists in strongly advocating the primacy of moral emotions (sympathy) in understanding human nature and moral behaviors.

Within the study of moral development, there has been a longstanding tradition to emphasize moral cognitions (e.g., moral reasoning or judgments), harmful behaviors (e.g., cheating, stealing, aggression), and justice-centered morality (Gibbs, 2003; Lapsley, 1996). Indeed, early theories of moral development were strongly influenced by cognitive-developmentalists (Piaget, 1932/1965; Kohlberg, 1969) who highlighted the role of moral judgments in issues of fairness and justice. In recent decades, there is growing recognition of the need to expand the areas of research in moral development to include morally relevant processes that go beyond moral understanding. Moreover, historical debates regarding the legitimate domains of morality have now been replaced with debates on how to integrate beneficent-centered and justice-centered perspectives (Gibbs, 2003; Lapsley, 1996). To this end, integrative theoretical approaches (e.g., social–cognitive, moral identity) have emerged that consider a multitude of personal and social influences, incorporate moral emotions and behaviors, and consider prosocial morality as important aspects of moral development (Hardy & Carlo, 2005).

**What Are Prosocial Behaviors?**

Prosocial behaviors are defined as overt actions intended to benefit others (Batson, 1998; Carlo, 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Staub, 1979). The term reflects such varied actions as sharing or donating resources, helping or assisting others, volunteering, cooperation, and comforting others. Prosocial behaviors are not just the low end of or absence of aggressive (or antisocial) behaviors. As will be reported later, the magnitude of negative relations between prosocial and aggressive behaviors is modest. A child who does not exhibit high levels of aggressive behaviors does not necessarily exhibit high levels of prosocial behaviors. Moreover, prosocial behaviors are not equivalent to socially competent behaviors (which include a number of other skills such as communicative and social interaction skills). However, one could consider prosocial behaviors as a dimension or element of social competence (see Carlo & de Guzman, 2009). Prosocial behaviors may also be related to other positive traits and qualities (e.g., self esteem, social responsibility, trust) but are theoretically distinct. Another reason why prosocial behaviors are not the same as social competence is that some forms of prosocial behaviors are grounded in moral principles, beliefs, or emotions (Carlo & de Guzman, 2009).

At first glance, the definition of prosocial behaviors appears relatively straightforward, but in fact there are many complexities. Somewhat analogous to the complexities facing aggression researchers, there are challenges regarding the multiple dimensions and multiple forms of prosocial behaviors. For example, by definition, the emphasis in prosocial behaviors is on both the intention and the consequences of such behaviors. However, with regard to consequences, one could distinguish between short- or long-term benefits.
of such actions. One could also consider actions that have benefits for both the helper and others. What about whether the benefits are material or psychological, direct or indirect? And how do we get at the underlying intentions or motives for such behaviors? Moreover, prosocial behaviors take place in social contexts; how do we account for context? All of these questions and considerations suggest that there are multiple forms of prosocial behaviors, each with distinct qualitative properties.

One of the most studied and debated forms of prosocial behaviors is reflected by the category of altruistic behaviors. There are several definitions of altruistic behaviors, but the term can be defined as intrinsically motivated actions primarily intended to benefit others. The key to this definition is that the primary motive (altruism) is to benefit others. That is, there may be multiple consequences to self and others, but in altruistic behaviors, the primary motive is for the benefit of others. Often, such behaviors are costly to the helper, sometimes even risky or life threatening. Furthermore, another important aspect to the definition is that such behaviors appear to be motivated by intrinsic processes. Scholars have identified at least three such processes: sympathy, internalized values or principles, or a strong prosocial or moral identity (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Staub, 2005). The emphasis on intrinsic motivating processes distinguishes altruistic behaviors from prosocial behaviors that may be motivated by external concerns (e.g., social approval, social power, money, punishment). Other challenges are addressed in that actions that have both long-term and short-term consequences can benefit both the helper and the helped. Finally, questions regarding any qualitative differences in material (e.g., goods, resources) or nonmaterial (e.g., self enhancement, happiness) benefits are moot because all benefits are considered relatively equal.

A recent development in the field of prosocial behavior is the renewed interest in conceptualizing and studying different forms of prosocial behaviors. Early researchers had noted modest interrelations among different types of prosocial behaviors and suggested the need for behavior-specific models of morality (Hartshone, May, & Shuttleworth, 1930). On the basis of prior research, Carlo and Randall (2001) proposed a typology of six commonly studied forms of prosocial tendencies. The types were chosen to include several more specific types of prosocial behaviors within each category, yet allow researchers to develop relatively specific hypotheses. Altruistic tendencies were operationally defined as actions beneficial to others without expectation for self-reward. Emotional tendencies referred to prosocial actions in response to affectively evocative situations. Dire tendencies reflect actions to benefit others in emergency situations. Responding to a direct request for assistance refers to compliant tendencies. Helping others in front of an audience was labeled a public tendency, whereas prosocial actions without the knowledge of others were referred to as anonymous tendencies. On the basis of this model, a paper-and-pencil measure of prosocial tendencies (Prosocial Tendencies Measure or PTM) was developed to use with adolescents and young adults (Carlo & Randall, 2002; Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen, & Randall, 2003; Carlo, Knight, McGinley, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2010).

Other researchers have developed and examined other types of prosocial behaviors such as prosocial behaviors in the home (Eberly & Montemayor, 1998), prosocial behaviors toward different target groups (e.g., family, peers, strangers, extended family; Carlo, Padilla-Walker, & Day, in press; Kumru, Carlo, & Edwards, 2004), spontaneous and compliant prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg, Cameron, Tryon, & Dodez, 1981), high- and
low-cost prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg & Shell, 1986), and different forms of cooperative behaviors (Knight, Bernal, & Carlo, 1995). Furthermore, some scholars have focused on delineating the specific task characteristics of specific prosocial behaviors (Knight, Bohlmeier, Schneider, & Harris, 1993). In all of this research, one goal is to conceptualize more sophisticated links between prosocial behaviors and their correlates. Discerning different forms of prosocial behaviors shows much promise in better describing age-related trends in prosocial behaviors and in developing new methodologies to advance this field. Ultimately, such advances might lead to the development of efficient intervention programs to foster prosocial behaviors.

**Theoretical Background**

*Evolutionary and Biological Perspectives*

Interest in the biological basis of prosocial actions has existed for many decades because such behaviors are presumed to have adaptive value in the procreation of the gene pool. Early scholars suggested that humans are most likely to engage in prosocial behaviors toward genetically related others (kin selection hypothesis). The genetic similarity hypothesis, on the other hand, suggests that such behaviors are most likely to occur when the helper perceives another individual as similar to one’s self. These two hypotheses imply that prosocial behaviors likely result as mechanisms designed to enhance survival of the gene pool (Sober & Wilson, 1998). Another postulate, the reciprocal altruism hypothesis, suggests that prosocial behaviors are frequently exhibited among individuals who expect reciprocal benefits. There is continued debate regarding these ideas, and new conceptual modifications of these hypotheses have been developed. However, many scholars have been spurred to examine the biological basis (e.g., genetics, hormonal, neural substrates, temperament) of prosocial behaviors.

Some scholars posit an evolutionary perspective on prosocial behaviors that emphasizes the functionality of such actions (Charlesworth, 1996; Hawley, 2002). *Prosocial controllers*, for example, engage in cooperative, socially competent behaviors that help assert their dominance over others and aid in attaining resources (Hawley, 2002, 2003). In contrast, *coercive controllers* engage in aggressive, antisocial behaviors that result in asserting their dominance in the group and in attaining resources. There is at least one other group, *bistrategic controllers*, who engage in both prosocial and coercive strategies. According to this perspective, prosocial behaviors then serve similar adaptive functions as antisocial behaviors (Hawley, 2003). This perspective focuses on distal motives for prosocial behaviors that stem from the attainment of resources and status that will enhance reproductive success. Thus, there is an implication that all prosocial behaviors are selfishly motivated. However, because the analysis focuses on more distal explanations and functions of prosocial behaviors, the view is not necessarily incompatible with other perspectives.

*Cognitive–Developmental Perspective*

Piaget’s (1932/1965) and Kohlberg’s (1969) ideas about the central role of cognitive development in understanding prosocial and moral development led to several decades of
research in this area. In particular, two sociocognitive processes were deemed important in explaining age-related differences in prosocial behaviors. The first process is perspective taking (i.e., understanding the situation of others). Scholars (Ford, 1979) identified three types of perspective taking: spatial or visual (i.e., understanding the literal point of view of another), emotional (i.e., understanding another’s affective state), and social (e.g., understanding another’s thoughts, intentions, attitudes, or beliefs). Of the three types, emotional and social were most strongly conceptually linked to predicting prosocial behaviors (Carlo & de Guzman, 2009). The hypothesis was that understanding another person’s emotional and social situation should facilitate consideration of a needy other and likely result in prosocial actions toward that person. In more recent years, this approach has been extended in studies of younger children that focus on theory of mind (ToM)—children’s understanding of the beliefs, intentions, feelings, and desires of others (see Flavell & Miller, 1998). Although some researchers pointed out that perspective taking can sometimes be used to manipulate or take advantage of others (Carlo, 2006), in general, higher levels of perspective taking and ToM is expected to facilitate prosocial behaviors.

A second major cognitive–developmental mechanism conceptually linked to prosocial behaviors is moral reasoning. Moral reasoning refers to how individuals think about social situations of justice, fairness, or welfare. There are two main types of moral reasoning—justice or prohibition-oriented moral reasoning and prosocial moral reasoning. Justice-oriented moral reasoning involves dilemmas that focus on violating individual or human rights and freedoms. Such situations often pit one’s rights in conflict with the rights of others, thereby possibly violating formal laws or societal rules. According to Kohlberg and others (Blasi, 1980; Kohlberg, 1969), individuals at higher stages of justice-oriented moral reasoning are likely to engage in prosocial behaviors toward others. This is because higher stages of such reasoning reflect universal moral principles that foster caring for others and reducing suffering in others. Furthermore, relatively high levels of perspective taking are required for higher-stage moral reasoning, and this facilitates helping others in need.

Prosocial moral reasoning refers to thinking about situations in which the needs and desires of one person are in conflict with those of another, in the relative absence of formal laws or social rules (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Conceptually, prosocial moral reasoning is more strongly linked to prosocial behaviors because such reasoning takes place in the context of a prosocial behavior opportunity rather than in a potentially transgressive context. Similar to justice-oriented moral reasoning, prosocial moral reasoning is hypothesized to develop with age as a result of cognitive development (e.g., perspective taking, abstraction, forethought skills). Eisenberg’s model of prosocial moral reasoning suggests that children’s thinking about prosocial dilemmas shifts from hedonistic and needs-oriented forms in early childhood, to approval and stereotypic forms in middle childhood, to empathic and internalized principled forms in early adolescence and beyond (see Eisenberg et al., 2006). In contrast to justice-oriented moral reasoning approaches (see, for example, Kohlberg’s [1969] first stage of moral reasoning that emphasizes authority figures and the avoidance of punishment), this approach presents young children as capable of engaging in selfless-oriented behaviors that consider the needs of others. Moreover, according to Eisenberg, individuals are capable of exhibiting various levels of prosocial moral reasoning within their cognitive–developmental capacities.
Socialization Perspectives

Early theories of moral socialization focused on parents as the primary socializing agent. Scholars identified two broad dimensions of parenting (support and control) as relevant to understanding the influence of parents on children's development. Supportive and warm relationships are expected to foster and promote children's prosocial development (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Hastings, Utendale, & Sullivan, 2007). Parents who provide encouragement and guidance for prosocial behaviors in their children characterize such relationships. Furthermore, highly supportive parents tend to have close relationships and open communication, thereby providing opportunities to model and transmit desired moral messages to their children. Finally, warm and supportive parents are likely to create positive affective family environments, which foster expression of caring for others (Carlo, 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2006).

Parental control, on the other hand, plays a more complex role in predicting prosocial development. For example, parents who are highly controlling tend to be overly strict and may resort to corporal punishment, which may undermine prosocial behaviors. Such parents may also express strong, intense emotions (e.g., anger) and exhibit underregulated, impulsive behaviors, which might result in children who learn that such behaviors are acceptable. Furthermore, such intense interactions might overwhelm any parental messages about morality, especially in the context of a transgression (Hoffman, 2000). Hoffman (2000) identified three general discipline practices that are associated with moral development—inductions (i.e., child-centered, explanations and reasoning), love withdrawal (i.e., practices that threaten parent's approval of their child), and power assertion (i.e., harsh, punitive practices that affirm the parent's authority without explanation). Of the three, inductions have been conceptually linked to higher levels of children's prosocial behaviors, whereas power assertion has been negatively linked to prosocial behaviors. In recent years, scholars have studied psychological control (loosely related to love withdrawal) and have suggested that such control leads to psychological maladjustment (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005). However, moderate levels of control may benefit prosocial development, especially if such control is combined with warmth and support (akin to the authoritative parenting style; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Grusec and Goodnow (1994) proposed an extension of those early models of moral socialization. These theorists suggest two broad dimensions that predict moral internalization, namely, openness to the message and accurate understanding. The interplay of these two dimensions is projected to lead to the internalization of parental moral values. A number of child (e.g., age, gender, temperament, expectancies) and parent (e.g., disciplining practices, consistency in moral messages, modeled behaviors) variables are proposed to predict the child's openness to the parental messages and the child's accurate interpretation of those messages. Although the model focuses on explaining how children might internalize moral messages, one could extend the model such that moral internalization might predict children's prosocial behaviors.

Considerably less attention has been devoted to the notion that parental practices in prosocial behavior contexts can be powerful venues for moral socialization (Carlo, 2006). Most children have a strong desire to gain the approval of their parents and others (e.g., teachers, peers), and this motive can serve to motivate children's prosocial behaviors (and mitigate antisocial behaviors). Children receive positive (e.g., praise, love), negative (e.g., scorn, punishment, minimization), or no (e.g., ignored) feedback when they engage in prosocial
behaviors from their parents (as well as other socialization agents). Furthermore, parents can transmit overt or subtle messages about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of children’s prosocial behaviors (or their failure to behave prosocially). Across time, this feedback and messages might result in changes to children’s sociocognitive and socioemotive scripts regarding prosocial behaviors, which in turn, might influence their prosocial self-concept and future prosocial behaviors (Carlo & Randall, 2001; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2004).

Relatively even less theorizing exists on the role of other socialization agents such as siblings, extended family members, peers, or media. Many of the processes relevant to understanding the role of parents in children’s prosocial development are assumed to apply in understanding the role of these other socializing agents. However, sibling interactions are important early social interactions that provide opportunities to develop sociocognitive and socioemotive abilities associated with prosocial actions (Dunn, 1988). Similarly, extended family members may play a relatively more important role in prosocial development when children develop close relationships with these other agents or in cultures where children spend considerable time with them (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Scholars (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002) have asserted that media that is more interactive or creative (e.g., texting, webcams, video games) and that may be relatively popular (e.g., magazines, blog sites, books), can have more powerful effects on children’s development than other media (e.g., TV, movies). As advances in technologies continue to evolve, the impact of social interactive media may grow. Moreover, scholars have noted the increasing influence of peers, as children spend relatively more time around peers than with their parents or family members (Youniss, 1994). Peers can model prosocial actions, provide feedback and messages regarding the importance of moral issues and prosocial behaviors, and afford social contexts for prosocial actions (Bukowski & Sippola, 1996; Piaget, 1932/1965; Youniss, 1994). All of these socialization agents provide ample opportunities for youth to practice and develop prosocial tendencies in different social contexts.

**Integrative Perspectives**

**Social Cognitive Perspectives**

Based on social learning and cognitive–developmental theories, social cognitive theorists propose integrative, complex perspectives to understanding prosocial behaviors (Carlo & Randall, 2001; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Staub, 1979). In these theories, personal characteristics (e.g., temperament, personality, sociocognitive and socioemotive traits) and socialization forces and context (e.g., SES, culture, parenting, media) are hypothesized to predict prosocial behaviors. Moreover, motivational processes also influence prosocial behaviors. Finally, these theorists suggest that there are feedback loops and bidirectional effects. Such theories are attempts to capture the complexity of predicting prosocial behaviors, and to capture individual differences in such behaviors.

**Moral Identity Perspectives**

Another attempt to understand moral development stems from scholars who view morality as an aspect of identity. Blasi (2004), for example, suggests that individuals develop a sense of moral self that encompasses a complex interplay of moral understanding, moral emotions,
and moral motivation. According to Blasi, individuals who develop a strong sense of moral self are likely to act in ways that are consistent with that moral self-concept. Thus, individuals who develop a strong prosocial self-identity ought to behave prosocially in relatively consistently ways across situations. In a related vein, a number of investigators have conducted research on care or moral exemplars (e.g., Hart & Fegley, 1996; Matsuba & Walker, 2004; see Hardy & Carlo, 2005). This line of research examines the characteristics associated with individuals who exhibit extraordinary or committed forms of prosocial moral behaviors. From this perspective, the centrality of morality to one’s self is key to understanding moral actions (Frimer & Walker, 2009), including prosocial behaviors. Moreover, the development of moral identity relies on the repeated interplay of sociocognitive and socioemotive processes associated with moral behaviors over time (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004).

**Current Research**

**Age-Related Differences**

Partly as a function of biological factors, early, simple forms of prosocial behaviors are evident in early childhood. Infants are capable of imitating facial expressions of sadness from infancy (Hastings et al., 2007). During the second year of life (as early as 12–14 months of age), children express sorrow or concern, sharing behaviors, offer comfort to others, and even help others at a cost to themselves (Hay & Cook, 2007; Lizskowski, Carpenter, Striano, & Tomasello, 2006; Svetlova, Nichols, & Brownell, 2010). As children’s cognitive and socioemotional abilities mature, children become capable of more sophisticated forms of prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2006). For example, perspective-taking development facilitates children’s abilities to discern the need in others, which, in turn, can result in helping others. Furthermore, self-regulatory skills (e.g., effortful control, executive functioning) enable children to modulate emotional responses adequately to focus on the need of others (rather than themselves) and assist others. Eventually, the expression of relatively sophisticated forms of prosocial behaviors (e.g., volunteerism) is likely from the cumulative effects of sociocognitive and socioemotive skill development, physical maturation, repeated practice and experiences, positive feedback from socialization agents, and contextual opportunities (Carlo & Randall, 2001).

Consistent with expectations, age-related increases in prosocial behaviors are evident across childhood to adolescence (Eisenberg et al., 2006). The largest increases in prosocial behaviors appear between preschool and adolescence, though increases are also evident between infancy and childhood, childhood and adolescence, and during adolescence (Eisenberg et al., 2006). However, caution is needed in interpreting these findings because most studies have been cross-sectional, and longitudinal designs are rare. For example, in several longitudinal studies of adolescents, researchers have reported declines in prosocial behaviors during adolescence (Carlo, Crockett, Randall, & Roesch, 2007; Nantel-Vivier et al., 2009; Phelps et al., 2007). These latter findings are concerning and pose a serious challenge to future researchers to understand this phenomenon during this age period. Moreover, the magnitude of effects in age-related differences may vary as a function of specific qualities of studies (e.g., type of prosocial behavior, year of publication; Eisenberg et al., 2006). For example, investigators reported that middle adolescents reported higher levels of anonymous
and altruistic tendencies than early adolescents, but there were no similar increases in other forms of helping (Carlo et al., 2003). These findings are consistent with the suggestion that some prosocial behaviors might require relatively more sophisticated sociocognitive abilities, and reinforce the need to differentiate among specific forms of prosocial behaviors.

**Gender-Related Differences**

According to some theorists, early theories of moral development overemphasized justice issues and did not adequately address the moral domains of caring and interpersonal relationships. Gender socialization theorists assert that girls are socialized to express nurturance and caring more than boys from early childhood (Brody, 1999; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Gilligan, 1982). These gender-specific socialization practices are endorsed by various socialization agents, including parents and family members, peers, other adults (e.g., teachers), and media (e.g., TV, movies, magazines), and are supported by institutions (e.g., gender segregation in schools). Girls, for example, are often praised or encouraged to express care-oriented prosocial tendencies (e.g., sadness, nurturance), whereas boys may be scorned or teased when expressing such tendencies, although anger is deemed acceptable (Brody, 1999). Furthermore, parents often expect and assign girls to engage in nurturing and caring behaviors more than boys, especially around the home (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). However, in some cases, boys may be asked to help more than girls. For example, boys may be asked to engage in instrumental or risky forms of helping (Carlo & Randall, 2001). These social experiences accumulate over time and are expected to partly account for gender differences in prosocial tendencies.

Studies yield supportive evidence on gender differences in prosocial behaviors such that, in general, girls manifest more such actions than boys (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Scholars note that such effects tend to be relatively modest in magnitude and that study characteristics can attenuate or exacerbate the effect sizes. However, it is important to note that gender may also moderate the relations between predictor variables and prosocial behaviors. Moreover, when researchers examine specific forms of prosocial behaviors, interesting patterns of findings emerge. For example, during adolescence, girls express prosocial behaviors in emotionally evocative contexts (e.g., when someone is crying) and exhibit altruistic behaviors more than boys, but boys exhibit more prosocial behaviors in public contexts (Carlo & Randall, 2002; Carlo et al., 2003). In addition, research among mostly college students suggests that young men are more likely to engage in risky and instrumental forms of helping, whereas young women are more likely to engage in nurturing forms of helping (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). Taken together, these findings suggest gender differences in prosocial behaviors are complex and that there are important moderating circumstances.

**Social Context–Based Research**

**Parental Correlates**

Most of the existing research on the influence of family in prosocial development has focused on parenting, especially the role of mothers. In early childhood, scholars have demonstrated that secure and close attachment relationships are associated with prosocial
tendencies (e.g., Laible, Carlo, Torquati, & Ontai, 2004). Measures of parent attachment in adolescence have also been linked to adolescents’ prosocial behaviors. However, the bulk of the research in childhood and adolescence shows that parental support is generally positively related to prosocial behaviors, and to a lesser extent, that parental control is negatively or unrelated to such behaviors (see Carlo, 2006). Parental monitoring (a form of behavioral control), however, appears to be positively linked to prosocial behaviors (Kerr, Beck, Shattuck, Kattar, & Uribraru, 2003). A few studies that directly compare the effects of fathers and mothers yield suggestive evidence that the mother’s parenting style is associated with youth prosocial behaviors more so than the father’s parenting style (Carlo et al., 2011; Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; see Hastings et al., 2007). Moreover, other researchers present evidence that parental inductions are positively linked to prosocial behaviors, whereas power assertion is negatively linked to such actions (Krevins & Gibbs, 1996; see Hoffman, 2000).

Parents also impact their children’s prosocial tendencies via practices designed to directly promote and foster such tendencies in nontransgressive contexts (Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, & Wilkinson, 2007). For example, parents sometimes reward their children when children express prosociality. Other times, parents discuss prosocial issues with their children through book readings or while watching television shows. Furthermore, some parents expect their children to help around the house or to engage in prosocial activities at school or in their community. Prior research had demonstrated some support for this notion such that the use of social rewards (e.g., verbal praise) but not material rewards (e.g., prizes) was associated with spontaneous prosocial behaviors (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1981). Further support for the importance of prosocial parenting practices has been reported in studies that show that the effects of parenting practices are direct or indirect through socioemotive traits (e.g., sympathy) or values (e.g., kindness, honesty, familism) (Calderón-Tena, Knight, & Carlo, 2011; Carlo et al., 2007; Carlo, Knight, McGinley, & Hayes, 2011). Moreover, there is growing support that children’s prosocial behaviors have reverse effects on parenting as well (Carlo, Padilla-Walker, & Day, in press; Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2011). Thus, the effects of parenting and the prosocial actions of their children seem to influence each other in a systemic manner across time.

In the most direct test of the Grusec and Goodnow (1994) model, Padilla-Walker (2007) presented supportive evidence that perception and openness predicted moral values, which in turn, predicted prosocial behaviors. Other research also demonstrates findings consistent with their model that examine predictors of perception and openness, show links between moral values and prosocial behaviors, or suggest that judgments of parental appropriateness are associated with prosocial behaviors (Hardy, Carlo, & Roesch, 2010; Hardy, Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2008; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2004, 2007). One study showed that prosocial values and behaviors were influenced by the quality of the marital relationship in families (Barry, Padilla-Walker, Madsen, & Nelson, 2008). Taken together, these studies suggest that we are just beginning to understand the various parenting variables relevant to, and the complex pathways by which parents can impact, children’s prosocial development.

**Siblings and Extended Families**

Although the majority of research on family influences focuses on parents, socialization scholars have acknowledged the need for research on siblings and extended family
members. Unfortunately, this area of research remains scarce. In her classic, naturalistic study of siblings, Dunn (1988) reported longitudinal evidence that toddlers exhibit reciprocated, prosocial behaviors mostly in play contexts. Dunn (1988) also noted that sibling interactions seem to promote social understanding (i.e., perspective taking) and a positive sense of self, which facilitates prosocial actions toward others. Mosier and Rogoff (2003) reported that older siblings are more cooperative with younger siblings in Guatemalan Mayan families than in U.S. families. In one other study, Knight and Chao (1991) showed that prosocial behaviors were more frequent among siblings (and friends) than among acquaintances. With regard to research on the influence of extended family members on children's prosocial development, we know of no such existing research. As the structure of families (e.g., stepfamilies) continue to change and as families from diverse cultures are studied, there is recognition of the important role that extended family members can have on children's prosocial behaviors.

Peer Correlates

Research on peer influences of youth prosocial behaviors is quite diverse. There is a body of evidence that suggests that peers transmit strong reinforcing or punishing messages regarding prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Other research shows that children who are relatively prosocial are also rated positively by peers and deemed more popular (Kuppens, Grietans, Onghena, & Michiels, 2009; McAuliffe, Hubbard, & Romano, 2009; Pakaslahti, Karjalainen, & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2002). Youth who report close attachment and good quality of relationships with their peers also tend to report relatively high levels of prosocial behaviors (Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, & Martinez, in press; Markiewicz, Doyle, & Brendgen, 2001), and prosocial children are less likely to interact with deviant peers (e.g., Lacourse et al., 2006). In summary, there is evidence that peers influence the expression of prosocial behaviors, but questions remain regarding the direction of causality and the mechanisms of influence.

Culture-Group Similarities and Differences

These models apply culture-specific processes (e.g., rituals, practices) to social cognitive models in understanding prosocial behaviors across different culture groups.

Early cross-cultural research on prosocial behaviors demonstrated relatively higher levels of cooperative and prosocial behaviors in collectivist-oriented societies (e.g., Mexicans, Kenyans) as compared to individualist-oriented societies (e.g., that of the United States; see Knight et al., 1995; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). More recent research continues to replicate such findings extending to other countries such as Brazil and the United States (Carlo, Roesch, Knight, & Koller, 2001) and Guatemala and the United States (Mosier & Rogoff, 2003). However, research also suggests that cross-cultural differences in prosocial behavior are not necessarily straightforward. For example, in one study, investigators reported that Kenyan children exhibited more prosocial behaviors toward relatives, but U.S. children exhibited more prosocial behaviors toward strangers (de Guzman, Carlo, & Edwards, 2008). These researchers speculated that such differences reflect behavioral opportunities that arise from the day-to-day rituals and social companions of children from
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Each culture. Some studies showed that more acculturated immigrant children of Mexican origin were less cooperative and prosocial than less acculturated immigrant children (de Guzman & Carlo, 2004; Knight & Kagan, 1977). However, in a U.S. sample, European American young adolescents scored higher than Mexican American young adolescents on measures of altruistic and compliant prosocial tendencies (Carlo, Knight et al., 2010), suggesting that cross-cultural differences in prosocial behaviors may depend upon the specific form of prosocial behavior. Moreover, other research demonstrates that children from the United States show more prosocial behaviors than children from Japan (Zahn-Waxler, Friedman, Cole, Mizuta, & Hiruma, 1996) and that children from Germany and Israel scored higher on prosocial behaviors than children from two Southeast Asian countries (Trommsdorff, Friedlmieier, & Mayer, 2007). To reconcile the different findings, these scholars note that Southeast Asian cultures value “saving face” and may be less likely to initiate prosocial behaviors that might embarrass a needy other.

Although these noted studies demonstrate cultural similarities and differences, direct research on the mechanisms that might produce such findings are needed. In one elaborated model, Knight and his colleagues (Knight, Bernal & Carlo, 1995) proposed that children’s prosocial behaviors result from ecological and socialization variables (including familial and nonfamilial agents) and children’s sense of ethnic identity at the more proximal level. Furthermore, these paths may be influenced by youths’ sociocognitive skills (such as perspective-taking skills). Carlo and de Guzman (2009) suggested that the cumulative effects of the broader social ecology (including receiving community characteristics, school context, life events, and family and peer contexts) are processed by youth via their sociocognitive and socioemotive traits (e.g., cultural values, ethnic identity, stress appraisals, empathy) and their perceived culture related stressors in predicting youth prosocial behaviors. Consistent with these models, strong endorsement of familistic values (i.e., duty or obligation toward family, support from the family, and family as self-referent) are associated with specific forms of prosocial behaviors but not others in Mexican American youth (Armenta, Knight, Carlo, & Jacobson, 2011), and such values predict helping around the home. In contrast, strong endorsement of U.S. mainstream values (i.e., material success, competition, self-reliance) predicted altruistic and public prosocial behaviors among Mexican American youth (Armenta et al., 2011). Two other studies presented evidence that parental inductions predict sympathy, which in turn, predicted more prosocial behaviors among Mexican American college students (Carlo, McGinley et al., in press) and early adolescents (Carlo, Knight et al., 2011).

Cultural psychological models of human development emphasized daily routines, practices, and rituals in the development of prosocial behaviors (Moiser & Rogoff, 2003; Whiting & Edwards, 1988; East, Weisner, & Slonim, 2009). Consistent with these theories, Mexican American mothers who endorsed familism were more likely to report the use of familistic prosocial practices (e.g., assign chores and duties to help family members), which then predicted youth report of those parental practices. Youth report of those parental practices also predicted youth endorsement of familism, which in turn predicted the youth report of helping behaviors toward family members (Calderon et al., 2011). This study is perhaps the most direct test of a cultural transmission model of prosocial behaviors that suggests the possible influence of mothers on youth prosocial behaviors through the fostering of values. Unfortunately the study was not longitudinal, thereby seriously limiting our ability to infer direction of causality.
Studies that focus solely on children from other countries offer possible insights into the generalizability of prosocial development models. For example, researchers showed that sympathy, perspective taking, and prosocial moral reasoning generally predicted prosocial behaviors among Brazilian youth (Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001), Spanish youth (Carlo, Mestre et al., 2010, 2011), and Indian children (Chandra & Misra, 2004). Hispanic orientation positively predicted prosocial behaviors among Latino early adolescents (Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007; see also Armenta et al., 2011). Among Indonesian Muslim children, religiousness positively predicted prosocial behaviors (French, Eisenberg, Vaughan, Purwono, & Suryanti, 2008). Among youth from Spain, parental support positively predicted prosocial behaviors via sympathy and prosocial moral reasoning (Carlo, Mestre et al., 2011). McGinley, Lipperman-Kreda, Byrnes, and Carlo (2010) presented evidence that parental modeling and encouragement predicted sympathy, which in turn, predicted prosocial tendencies and volunteerism among Israeli adolescents. Other studies show that prosocial behaviors predict more social acceptance in Finland (Pakaslahti et al., 2002), and higher levels of academic achievement in China (Chen et al., 2002) and in Italy (Caprara et al., 2000).

Media Correlates

Research on the influence of media on prosocial development is rather skewed. To date, most of the existing research still focuses on TV and film, to the relative scarcity of computer/video games, magazines/books, and social media. Furthermore, most research on media influence highlights the role of negative media (e.g., violence, aggression) on youth development. In many studies, researchers demonstrated that exposure to positive film models and behaviors could induce prosocial behaviors in children (Huston & Wright, 1998; Staub, 1979). Hearold (1986) concluded that watching positive television had strong effects on children’s prosocial behaviors and that the effect was over twice the strength of watching antisocial television programs (see also Mares & Woodard, 2005). There are also some studies that examine positive consequences of watching intentional prosocial television programming (e.g., Sesame Street, Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood) though the findings are sometimes inconsistent (Hogan & Strasburger, 2010), perhaps due to moderating factors (e.g., co-watching with parents, SES, specific TV program). In an experimental field study, Borzekowski and Henry (2011) showed that a 4-month exposure to a prosocial television show in a poor community in Indonesia resulted in higher prosocial behavior scores as compared to a control group. Overall, the evidence is quite consistent on the positive links between prosocial TV and prosocial behaviors, and the findings are impressive given the diverse methodologies and samples.

Beyond TV and films, some studies have shown the potential effects of exposure to prosocial video games (see Hogan & Strasburger, 2010, for a thorough review). For example, in a series of studies, Gentile et al. (2009) showed longitudinal and experimental evidence that interaction with prosocial games predicted prosocial behaviors. Similarly, playing prosocial video games was associated with more prosocial attributions about game characters than playing neutral or aggressive games (Narvaez, Mattan, MacMichael, & Squillace, 2008). Time spent playing video games was associated with less prosocial
behaviors (Coyne et al., 2011). In a related study of cyberbullying, investigators demonstrated lower levels of empathy among youth involved in cyberbullying than those not involved in such behaviors (Schultze-Krumbholz & Scheithauer, 2009). The findings suggest that repeated exposure to prosocial media might gradually shape children’s prosocial schemas and scripts and, in turn, their prosocial actions.

**Person-Based Research**

**Biologically Based Correlates**

For years, animal researchers have demonstrated that many social animal species (including insects and mammals) exhibit altruistic and prosocial behaviors (de Waal, 1996; Sober & Wilson, 1998; Tomasello, 2009). Biomedical research shows that elevated levels of vasopressin (especially in males) and oxytocin (especially in females) are associated with prosocial behaviors in mammals (e.g., rats, prairie voles) and in humans (see Zoe & Donaldson, 2008). Although the strong heritability basis of prosocial tendencies had been established in early human studies (e.g., Emde et al., 1992) and in more recent human studies (e.g., Deater-Deckard et al., 2001; Knafo & Plomin, 2006; Knafo et al., 2008; Scourfield, Martin, Eley, McGuffin, & Cherny, 2004), new research focuses on identifying gene alleles associated with such behaviors. Several studies suggest that a dopamine-receptor (DRD4 gene) is linked to prosocial behaviors (Dilalla, Elam, & Smolen, 2009; Knafo, Israel, & Ebstein, 2011; see also Reuter, Frenzel, Walter, Markett, & Montag, 2010). Other studies suggest that an oxytocin receptor gene (Israel et al., 2009) and a vasopressin receptor gene (Knafo et al., 2008) may also play a role in specific forms of prosocial behaviors. Relatedly, scholars have also begun to examine Gene X Environment models of prosocial behaviors (e.g., Knafo et al., 2011), in attempts to account for more systematic variance in prosocial behaviors. Based on studies in humans (Knafo et al., 2011; Marsh et al., 2011; Reuter et al., 2010), dopamine- and serotonin-based neuropeptide candidates may be involved in rewarding prosocial behaviors. These processes may be proximal level mediator variables that explain the links between gene alleles and behavioral expression.

Harbaugh, Mayr, and Burghart (2007) compared the fMRI images of individuals who donated monies for the sense of agency from giving (termed *warm glow*) and those who donated monies for the benefit of needy others (termed *pure altruism*) in a dilemma task. They also manipulated whether such giving was voluntary or mandatory (i.e., taxes). Their results suggested that warm glow and pure altruistic givers had similar reward regions of their neural circuits (the ventral striatum) activated, even when such giving was mandatory (i.e., taxes). The findings suggest a common underlying neural reward structure for individuals who engage in charitable giving (see also Telzer et al., 2010, 2011). Other research (Loke, Evans, & Lee, 2011) has examined the neural activity using ERP methods associated with decisions to help or not help, in individuals who exhibit high levels of a prosocial personality (i.e., strong endorsements of multiple aspects of prosociality). These latter researchers reported peak activation of the right parietal region in prosocial decision making. These provocative findings are expanding our understanding of the role of biological mechanisms in prosocial development.
Sociocognitive Correlates

The interest in accounting for age-related changes in prosocial behaviors led to a focus on social cognitions, as there are age-related changes in such variables. Meta-analytic reviews of the empirical research generally demonstrate modest, positive relations between perspective taking (i.e., understanding another’s situation) and prosocial behaviors in children and adolescents (see Carlo et al., 2009). Some scholars suggested that these inconsistent findings might be due to measurement problems (Ford, 1979), whereas others suggested that there may be conceptual flaws in the hypothesized relations (Eisenberg et al., 2006). A recent meta-analytic investigation that assessed the conceptual match between perspective-taking tasks and prosocial behaviors also supported the importance of matching task characteristics (Carlo & de Guzman, 2009; see also Carlo, Eisenberg, Knight, & Rotenberg, 1991). In another study, investigators also showed that prosocial behaviors (i.e., donating money) could be better predicted when the interactive effect of perspective taking, sympathy, and a task-specific cognitive skill (i.e., understanding the value and units of money) were considered (Knight, Johnson, Carlo, & Eisenberg, 1994). These studies yield evidence that the links between perspective taking and prosocial behavior are complex.

The interest in the role of perspective taking extends into more recent research on theory of mind (ToM) and prosocial behaviors in very young children. This research identifies more cognitive-specific skills, including children’s understanding of desires, beliefs, intentions, thoughts, and emotions, which might be linked to such actions (see Flavell & Miller, 1998). In several studies, researchers have found significant positive relations between such understanding skills and prosocial behaviors (Eggum et al., 2011; Lane, Wellman, Olson, LaBounty, & Kerr, 2010). For example, Vaish, Carpenter, and Tomasello (2009) found that witnessing harm in others (even in the absence of overt affective distress cues) was positively related to prosocial behaviors among toddlers. In general, the findings suggest that children who are more adept at understanding the mental states of themselves and others are more likely to help others. However, some studies (e.g., Lane et al., 2010) report nonsignificant relations between ToM and prosocial behaviors—perhaps, such studies need to heed the lessons of the earlier research on perspective taking and consider the conceptual match between the task characteristics of ToM and prosocial behaviors.

Another important sociocognitive correlate of prosocial behaviors is (justice- and prosocial-oriented) moral reasoning. Researchers generally report positive relations between justice-oriented moral reasoning and prosocial behaviors (Malti, Gummerum, Keller, & Buchmann, 2009; Malti, Gusser, & Buchmann, 2009), although there are inconsistent results in some studies (see Blasi, 1980; Rest, 1983). However, of the two forms of moral reasoning, prosocial moral reasoning is perhaps most conceptually linked to prosocial behaviors. A number of studies demonstrate positive relations between prosocial moral reasoning and prosocial behaviors across childhood and adolescence (see Eisenberg et al., 2006). Some studies, for example, show other-oriented (e.g., needs-oriented) and higher-level prosocial moral reasoning to be positively associated with prosocial behaviors (Carlo, Mestre et al., 2010, 2011; Kumru, Carlo, Mestre, & Samper, 2012). In a recent study, Carlo, Knight et al. (2011) demonstrated that prosocial moral reasoning predicted altruistic, anonymous, and public forms of helping but not other forms of helping (e.g., emotional, dire, compliant). Thus, prosocial moral reasoning may be more relevant in
predicting some of forms of prosocial behaviors, whereas other traits (e.g., sympathy) may be more relevant in predicting other forms of prosocial behaviors.

Moral Identity
A burgeoning area of research is the study of moral identity and its links to altruistic and prosocial behaviors. In much of this research, scholars conduct interviews of persons who have been nominated or recognized by others as heroic altruists (e.g., peer nominations, award recipients) and find that such persons have strong moral self-concept (Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2007; Walker & Frimer, 2007). Supportive experimental and quasi-experimental evidence on altruistic actions continues to mount in adolescents and young adults (see Batson, 1998). Hart and Fegley (1995) reported more integrated moral selves in a sample of peer-nominated, care-exemplar youth (as compared to a low-SES matched youth group) from an inner city neighborhood. Some personality researchers operationalize moral identity by administering a battery of prosocial personality measures and demonstrate that high scorers on these altruistic or prosocial personality measures are more likely to exhibit altruistic behaviors (e.g., Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007; Midlarsky, Jones, & Corley, 2005) and more likely to volunteer (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). A cognitive-based moral conscience measure was positively associated with altruistic behaviors but not other forms of prosocial behaviors in young adolescents (Laible, Eye, & Carlo, 2008). Longitudinal studies of children and adolescents also suggest relatively stable individual differences in altruistic tendencies across the lifespan and across situations (Carlo, Crockett, Randall, & Roesch, 2007; Eisenberg et al., 2002). However, additional direct evidence of altruistic behaviors in children is sparse because most researchers do not distinguish altruistic actions from other forms of prosocial behaviors (Carlo, 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2006). In addition, most studies in this area focus on the empathy–altruism link (see Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Morris, this volume), and few studies directly examine internalized principles or values as motives for altruistic behaviors.

Other Social Cognitions
Based on a social information-processing approach, Nelson and Crick (1999) showed that youth who were rated high in prosocial behaviors by peers were more likely to make benign attributions (i.e., willing to assume nonhostile intent) in ambiguous social situations. Other studies suggest that prosocial youth are more likely to expect their parents to react appropriately to prosocial and antisocial situations (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2004). A different set of studies shows that youth who endorse prosocial values (e.g., kindness, familism, social responsibility) are more likely to exhibit high levels of prosocial behaviors (Armenta et al., 2011; Barry et al., 2008; Calderon et al., 2010; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2007). In one study, for example, adolescents who viewed themselves as strongly religious were more likely to endorse kindness, which in turn positively predicted prosocial behaviors (Hardy & Carlo, 2005). High levels of social self-efficacy (Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni, 2008) and identity achievement (Hardy & Kiesling, 2006; Padilla-Walker et al., 2008) are also related to higher levels of prosocial behaviors.
Socioemotive Correlates

Perhaps no other person-based variable has been linked to prosocial behaviors more than empathy (i.e., feeling the same as another) and sympathy (i.e., feelings of sadness or sorrow for another; see Eisenberg et al., this volume). However, other social emotions have also been linked to prosocial behaviors (see Eisenberg et al. in this volume for a review of temperament research). Although deemed central to moral development, few studies focus directly on the relations between guilt (i.e., aversive feeling that stems from violation of internal standards) and shame (i.e., aversive feeling that stems from violation of external standards) and prosocial behaviors. Kochanska (1994) provides the most relevant research on this link and suggests that whereas guilt is positively associated with prosocial behaviors, shame is negatively or unrelated to such behaviors (see also Tangney & Dearing, 2002). However, other research suggests that both guilt and shame are positively associated with prosocial and moral developmental outcomes (Bedford & Hwang, 2003; Fung & Chun, 2001; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1996), and a study of early adolescents showed positive relations between both social emotions and prosocial behaviors (Laible et al., 2008). Anger, on the other hand, has been consistently negatively associated with prosocial behaviors (e.g., Carlo, Roesch, & Melby, 1998; Cummings & Smith, 1993). The relatively consistent findings concerning these variables are likely partly due to the required self-regulation skills necessary to engage in prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2006). However, it is also likely that anger might be positively linked to some forms of prosocial-like behaviors (e.g., prosocial coercive behaviors; Hawley, 2002). Other emotions comparatively less studied in children but conceptually linked include forgiveness, pride, and embarrassment (see, e.g., Karremans, Van Lange, & Holland, 2005; Kochanska, 1994).

Behavioral and Health Correlates

The evidence generally shows that aggression and prosocial behaviors are moderately negatively associated (or unrelated) such that prosocial behaviors are not just the reverse side of aggressive behaviors, or vice versa (Bowker et al., 2010; Hawley, 2002; Persson, 2005; Veenstra et al., 2008). Furthermore, youth can exhibit high levels of both aggressive and prosocial behaviors, low levels of both behaviors, or high levels of one and low levels of the other behavior (e.g., Hawley, 2002; Kokko et al., 2006; Laible, Carlo, Panfile, Eye, & Parker, 2010; Veenstra et al., 2008). Several researchers demonstrate negative relations between prosocial behaviors and substance use (Carlo, Crockett, Wilkinson, & Beal, 2011; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). Adolescents’ prosocial behaviors predicted substance use in young adulthood (7 years later), even after statistically controlling for substance use in adolescence (Carlo, Crockett et al., 2011). The relations between prosocial and antisocial behaviors are likely dependent upon a number of moderating factors (e.g., motives, sociocognitive and self regulation skills, specific aggressive and prosocial acts).

A less well-studied area of prosocial behaviors is the relation between prosocial behaviors and psychological and behavioral health. Because prosocial behaviors are predicted by warm, nurturing relationships (including parents, peers), exposure to prosocial media, good self-regulation skills, positive sociocognitive and socioemotive competencies, and encouraged in supportive sociocultural environments (see Carlo, 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2006), one
might expect that such actions are positively associated with indicators of psychological and behavioral health. Danner and her colleagues (Danner, Friesen, & Carter, 2007; Danner, Snowden, & Friesen, 2001) suggest that prosocial behaviors might be positively related to health through the frequent expression of positive emotions (which is linked to better health; see Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, & Steward, 2000). In a 6-decade longitudinal study, these scholars showed that young adult nuns who expressed relatively high levels of positive emotions (e.g., gratitude, kindness) were more likely to live an average of between 7 and 11 years longer (Danner et al., 2001; see also Musick, Herzog, & House, 1999). Among children and adolescents, prosocial behaviors are linked to psychological and social well-being such as positive mood, trust, less loneliness, lower anxiety, and high self-esteem (Carlson & Miller, 1987; Laible, Carlo & Roesch, 2004; Rotenberg et al., 2005; Telzer & Fuligni, 2009). Furthermore, in general, stress is significantly related to prosocial behaviors—however, the direction of relations is mixed (McGinley et al., 2010). In some studies, stress is positively linked to prosocial behaviors (Cummings & Smith, 1993; deGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008), whereas the link is negative in other studies (Keresteš, 2006; Kishon-Barush, Midlarsky, & Johnson, 1999; Mejia, Kliewer, & Williams, 2006). Those relations may depend upon the length of exposure (i.e., chronic or temporary), whether they experience the stress directly or indirectly (e.g., observed), whether the prosocial behavior is costly or risky to the self, and the intensity of stress.

Another important behavioral correlate of prosocial behaviors is academic performance. There is substantial evidence demonstrating strong positive links between prosocial behaviors and academic achievement or performance (Caprara et al., 2000; Miles & Stipek, 2006); although Telzer and Fuligni (2009), reported lower GPA for Mexican and Asian Americans who spent more time helping around the home. Prosocial behaviors (but not aggression) predicted academic achievement 5 years later even after controlling for earlier academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2000). Taken together, the studies on behavioral and health correlates add mounting evidence that prosocial behaviors are not only indicators of moral development and social adjustment but also that such behaviors influence later adjustment.

**Conclusions**

In the past 3 decades, there have been many advances in our understanding of the development of prosocial behaviors. New and integrative models that elaborate on the biological and socialization basis of these behaviors are emerging. Furthermore, there have been several advances in the measurement and study designs of prosocial development. We now have more understanding regarding the person- and social-based predictors of prosocial behaviors, as well as how prosocial behaviors predict other behavioral and psychological outcomes. Furthermore, the recent growth in longitudinal and cross-cultural studies has resulted in better tests of the long-term effects and generalizability of existing models. As the findings regarding the biological basis of such actions accrue, there will surely be new and exciting models (e.g., Gene X Environment) and research in this area. However, despite these numerous advances, there are many gaps in our knowledge base, and the existing research is methodologically limited. Moreover, more work is needed in developing and examining the psychometric properties of measures of prosocial behaviors. In
addition, direct tests of more comprehensive models of prosocial development models are relatively rare. Finally, research that examines prosocial behaviors as an indicator of behavioral health is just emerging but is promising. The continued interest in the study of prosocial behaviors will result in enhancement of our understanding of moral development, and such research directly improves the health and well-being of our children and our communities.

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The Development and Correlates of Prosocial Moral Behaviors


This chapter focuses on individual differences in the emotions children and adolescents expect various moral/immoral acts to produce and the relation of these moral emotion attributions to aggressive and antisocial tendencies. For example, do more aggressive children, like the adolescent quoted above, really expect aggression to have different emotional outcomes than their peers? And how can potential moral emotion attribution–aggression links be explained; what theoretical models can account for both general developmental patterns in children’s moral emotion attributions as well as the emergence of important individual differences?

This specific focus on moral emotion attributions and aggression is part of a larger literature on children’s conceptions of the links between emotion and different kinds of social events (see, e.g., Harris, 2008). Initial interest in these more general affect–event links was guided by several assumptions. First, through their experiences with peers, adults, and other socializing agents, children become aware of some of the key connections between common social events and their likely emotional consequences. And, secondly, as Harris (1985) and others (Bandura, 1986; Lazarus, 1991) originally argued, many of our behavioral decisions will be influenced “by an anticipation of how we will feel in some future situation. A child’s readiness to . . . seek out a new friend or avoid punishment is based on an appraisal of how he or she will feel when facing those situations” (Harris, 1985, p. 162).

Although questions have been raised about this original model (e.g., Harris, 2008), there is also growing evidence that individual differences in moral emotion attributions are clearly related to children’s aggressive/antisocial behaviors. For example, a recent meta-analysis (Malti & Krettenauer, 2013) of this research, including more than 40 studies and 8,000 participants, found significant relationships between children’s and adolescents’ moral emotion attributions and both their prosocial and antisocial tendencies (see also,
Malti & Ongley, this volume, on moral emotion attributions and prosocial behavior). Moreover, the magnitude of the connections between moral emotion attributions and aggressive behavior, in particular, increased substantially in studies that included certain common methodological refinements.

The present chapter provides a selective review of theory and research on children’s moral emotion attributions and aggressive tendencies. Two additional themes underlie much of this chapter. The first is the importance of clearly identifying what is moral about moral emotion attributions. Many moral emotion attribution studies include a mix of different moral (e.g., aggression vs. prosocial) and broadly sociomoral events (e.g., social conventions and personal limits). It will be argued that explicitly addressing established moral domain distinctions (e.g., Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006) has led to a clearer understanding of how and why moral emotion attributions are related to aggressive behavior. A second theme is that perhaps the most familiar account of the relation between emotion and aggression—the “hot-headed” frustration–aggression model (e.g., Berkowitz, 1989; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sear, 1939)—is in clear need of revision and expansion. As will be seen below, the results of most moral emotion attribution studies indicate that children who expect to feel happier or less guilty than their peers are more likely to be aggressive. By contrast, there is surprisingly little evidence for the importance of children’s moral anger attributions in relation to aggressive behavior. Explanations for these little-discussed patterns, including the role of different forms and functions of aggression, will be explored.

In summary, the following review addresses the emerging literature on the connections between aggression and children’s moral emotion attributions. A brief introductory section focuses on theoretical and developmental accounts of moral emotions with the goal of providing a context for the subsequent focus on individual differences. This is followed by sections that address early research on individual differences, as well as observational studies of young children’s actual morally relevant emotions. The final sections describe some of the newer work on moral emotion attributions, including recent attempts to integrate research on moral emotion attributions with related concepts from the social information-processing literature.

**Moral Emotion Attributions—A Brief Background**

“Feelings are not superfluous. . . . It is a matter of discovering the circumstances in which feelings can indeed be an arbiter and using the reasoned coupling of circumstances and feelings as a guide to human behavior.”

(Damasio, 2003, p. 179)

As noted above, studies of children’s and adolescents’ moral emotion attributions are guided by the idea that individuals remember the emotional antecedents and consequences of social events and that these stored representations of the “coupling of circumstances and feelings” regarding moral events can then be used to guide future behavior. An important study by Barden, Zelko, Duncan, and Masters (1980) was arguably the first to be influenced by these basic ideas about affect–event links. In that work, kindergartners, third graders, and sixth graders were presented with brief descriptions of salient social events and were asked how they would feel if the event actually happened to them.
Although there were many shared affect–event links (e.g., academic failure leads to negative feelings), there was one striking age-related difference for feelings following the undetected theft of desirable objects. Specifically, although third and sixth graders expected to feel mostly negative emotions, nearly half of the kindergartners expected to feel happy, most likely due to the gain resulting from the theft. And in a later study, these researchers (Zelko, Duncan, Garber, & Masters, 1986) found that adults did not anticipate this “happy thief” attribution on the part of kindergartners, which, the authors concluded, could affect adults’ ability to be effective socialization agents for young children.

Young children’s “happy victimizer” moral attributions emerged in other early research (e.g., Arsenio, 1988; Arsenio & Ford, 1985), but a study by Nunner-Winkler and Sodian (1988) was the first to focus explicitly on this seemingly puzzling moral attribution. Nunner-Winkler and Sodian (1988) began by arguing that moral events are likely to produce strong conflicting feelings, so that, “a person who violates a moral rule may, for instance, experience joy at the success of his or her forbidden behavior and or guilt, shame, or remorse at his or her immoral behavior” (p. 1323). The authors also observed that children’s expectation that they might feel unpleasant emotions following victimization could play a key role in their moral motivation.

In their three-part study, they assessed the moral emotion attributions of 4-, 6-, and 8-year olds and found that a great majority of 4-year olds and a minority of 8-year olds expected to feel happy following successful acts of victimization (including theft and physical harm to others that produced clear gains). Moreover, attempts to manipulate the salience of the negative consequences for victims had very little influence on 4-year olds’ moral emotion attributions. The authors argued that their collective findings supported the idea of a moral emotional attributional shift from younger children’s outcome orientations—“victimizers are happy if they get what they want”—to older children’s more overtly moral orientation—“victimizers feel bad because they see what they did to the victim.”

In a subsequent study, Arsenio and Kramer (1992) examined these age-related patterns with a particular focus on the strength of young children’s “happy victimizer” moral emotion attributions. Children ages 4, 6, and 8 judged the emotional consequences of victimizing acts (stealing candy and knocking someone off a swing to get a turn), and, unlike in the Nunner-Winkler and Sodian study (1988), children rated both the victims’ and victimizers’ responses. In addition, story characters were described as either good friends or, in another condition, the participant was described as the victim and his or her best friend was the victimizer. Increasing the salience of the victims’ losses, however, had little influence on young children’s moral emotion attributions. Although children in all three age groups judged that victims would feel strongly negative emotions, nearly all of the younger children expected that victimizers would feel positive emotions stemming from the clear gains produced by victimization.

Subsequent attempts to explain the psychological meaning and significance of these findings have focused on several issues. For example, we (e.g., Arsenio, 2006; Arsenio & Lover, 1995) have argued that the shift from 4-year olds’ moral attribution that victimizers are mostly happy to 8-year olds’ more mixed attributions (i.e., positive and negative emotions) reflects a central moral conflict: Victimizing brings desirable outcomes and emotions, but being victimizing brings strong negative feelings and a deep sense of unfairness. In essence, becoming moral involves both cognitive abilities (e.g., coordinating victims’
and victimizers’ responses) and the affective tendencies (e.g., through attachment-based emotional reciprocity) that can give what is seen as morally “right” its motivational power.

Other researchers, however, have noted that this broad theoretical focus does not really explain preschoolers’ happy victimizer attributions, per se. For example, Lagattuta (2005) has argued that happy victimizer attributions are the result of more general cognitive limitations in young children that have little to do with moral considerations involving harm. And, more generally, observational research suggests that preschoolers are both more altruistic (e.g., Denham, 1986; Tomasello, 2009) and less aggressive (e.g., Arsenio, Cooperman, & Lover, 2000) than the prevalent “happy victimizer” attribution would seem to suggest.

A full treatment of these issues is well beyond the scope of this chapter. Yet this brief discussion of the theoretical origins and early work on moral emotion attributions provides a framework for several key ideas that underlie the rest of this chapter. First, it is quite common for young children to attribute happy/less negative moral emotions to victimizers; there is even some evidence that this normative developmental expectation continues into adulthood (Murgatroyd & Robinson, 1997; and see Arsenio, Gold, & Adams, 2006, for a review). Second, notwithstanding these broad developmental patterns, individual differences in children’s and adolescents’ moral attributions are consistently related to aggressive/antisocial behavior. Put simply, if child “A” expects to feel very happy after stealing someone’s candy, whereas child “B” expects to feel sad, then—all things being equal—child “A” is more likely than child “B” to steal candy. The following sections summarize some of the available empirical literature on these connections between moral emotion attributions (and actual emotion displays) and children’s aggressive tendencies.

**Individual and Group Differences in Moral Emotion Attributions—Initial Research**

A study by Asendorph and Nunner-Winkler (1992) is arguably the first to explicitly examine individual differences in children’s moral emotion attributions. The authors framed their work in a way that aptly summarizes why moral emotion attributions are likely to matter to both children and moral researchers:

> Our central hypothesis is that the extent to which children attribute emotions in a morally appropriate way to hypothetical protagonists in moral conflicts is a good empirical indicator of the strength of children’s moral motive, that is, for their readiness to abide by the moral rules they understand to be valid. (pp. 1223–1224)

Asendorph and Nunner-Winkler assessed children’s moral motive strength at ages 5 and 7 years by presenting children with four moral stories (one involving stealing and three involving prosocial actions, e.g., sharing a drink with a needy child). Story protagonists were described as knowing the relevant moral rule, but choosing to violate it even though the victims were sad. Children were asked how the story protagonists felt and why, and responses were subsequently coded as moral (e.g., feels bad for transgressing and could give a relevant rationale) or not moral. Higher moral scores were seen as reflecting higher moral motive strength, that is, a greater inclination to help and avoid harming others.
Additional measures in this longitudinal study assessed children’s cheating behavior at age 6 (sneaking a look at an object to obtain a prize), and children’s conflictual behavior at age 7 when placed in peer triads competing for time with an attractive video that could only be viewed by a single child.

As expected, children with higher moral motive strength showed less cheating behavior at age 6 and were less likely to have problematic/egoistic interactions in their triadic interactions at age 7. Other parts of the study revealed that higher moral motive strength and greater temperamental inhibition (as rated by parents) were independent predictors of children’s cheating behavior at age 6, but that higher moral motive strength and temperamental inhibition interacted in complex ways in predicting children’s conflictual behavior. (See also Lake, Lane, & Harris, 1995, for additional evidence linking moral emotion attributions to 5- and 6-year olds’ behavior in a cheating task.)

A subsequent study by Arsenio and Fleiss (1996) assessed group differences in moral emotion attributions with a more explicit focus on aggression, per se. Two groups of 6- to 12 year-old children (40 boys and 8 girls total) participated, including one group referred to a mental health facility because of significant problems involving aggressiveness, defiance, property damage, and lying (i.e., meeting DSM III-R [American Psychiatric Association, 1987] diagnostic criteria for either oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder). The nonreferred comparison group came from comparable middle- to lower-middle-class communities, and analyses indicated that the two groups did not differ in terms of ethnicity, maternal education, or broad levels of cognitive functioning. Participants were presented with stories representing four different types of sociomoral events (i.e., involving prescriptive limits of interpersonal behaviors): moral transgressions, simple prosocial acts, stopping observed acts of victimization, and breaking social conventions. Children were asked how the two story characters, one who initiated the action and the other who was the target of that action, felt at the conclusion of the story and why.

Both groups had systematic and differentiated conceptions of sociomoral emotions that were consistent with earlier studies of domain-related differences in emotion attributions (e.g., Arsenio & Ford, 1985; Arsenio, 1988; and see Nucci, 2001, for a summary). For example, both groups expected that simple prosocial acts would make the actors and recipients mostly happy, and that moral victims would feel quite negatively. There were, however, also important group differences. For moral transgressions, behaviorally disruptive (BD) children expected that both victims and transgressors would feel less fear than comparison children. In addition, compared to their peers, BD children were more likely to explain moral transgressors’ emotions by referring to the desirable material and psychological gains produced by the transgression rather than any losses experienced by the victims. In other words, “BD children view victimization in more positive terms for victimizers” (Arsenio & Fleiss, 1996, p. 183) than their less aggressive peers. Somewhat surprisingly, however, BD children also expected simple prosocial acts to produce more overall positive emotions for actors and recipients, although BD children were more likely to justify prosocial actors’ positive emotions by referring to what was avoided (“he didn’t hurt him”) than their peers.

The most important implication of this work is that disruptive/aggressive children have a somewhat different set of moral emotion attributions than their peers. For example, compared to their peers, aggressive children’s emotion attributions for actors in both moral
transgressions and simple prosocial acts seemed to ignore the consequences of these events for recipients—suggesting a kind of moral egocentrism. Overall, BD children’s atypical sociomoral emotion attributions have the clear potential to perpetuate their ongoing maladaptive patterns of disruptive, oppositional, and aggressive behavior.

Another important study implication is that children’s emotions attributions were highly sensitive to the nature of the particular domain of different stimulus events chosen. Domain–related research (e.g., Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006) has consistently shown that children and adults make conceptual and behavioral distinctions between moral events that involve intrinsic harm and other types of prescriptive sociomoral limits (see also Tisak, Tisak, & Goldstein, 2006, regarding these distinctions in aggressive/delinquent participants). And despite important group differences, both BD and typical children in the Arsenio and Fleiss (1996) study distinguished among the four types of sociomoral events included, both in terms of expected emotional outcomes and the explanations given for their outcomes.

These findings raise a number of largely unaddressed questions about how to conceptualize and study children’s moral emotion attributions. One key question involves the common assumption that transgressions involving victimization and failures to act prosocially are conceptually and empirically interchangeable. Many of the studies in Malti and Krettenauer’s (2013) meta-analysis, for example, simply collapsed data for these two types of transgressions (i.e., involving overt harm and unfairness versus failing to share or help). Consequently, it is unclear whether these two types of moral attributions are really related (and how strongly) or whether they might have different connections with children’s prosocial versus aggressive/immoral behaviors (see also below).

Observational Studies of Victimization-Related Emotions

With the growth of this early literature on moral emotion attributions, important questions were being raised about their psychological meaning and significance. One criticism (e.g., Lourenco, 1997) was that studies were focusing exclusively on children’s conceptions of these emotions, without also examining the actual emotions children displayed in these contexts. Developmentally oriented studies (e.g., Arsenio & Kramer, 1992; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988) certainly suggested that preschoolers often expect that moral transgressors (including themselves) would feel happy. However, there was no observational evidence to support this “happy victimizer” conception, or to examine whether individual differences in positive emotions might be related to children’s aggressive tendencies (although see Fabes and Eisenberg, 1992, on preschoolers’ coping with anger-eliciting situations).

With this issue in mind, my students, colleagues, and I conducted a series of observational studies on preschoolers’ victimization-related emotions (Arsenio & Killen, 1997; Arsenio & Lover, 1997). In the most extensive of these studies (Arsenio, Cooperman, & Lover, 2000) we assessed 4-year olds’ aggressive interactions and the emotions they displayed both during and outside of their aggressive interactions. During the course of this yearlong study, we found that children infrequently displayed anger outside of their actual aggressive interactions (i.e., during “baseline” contexts). Yet children who displayed more anger in these baseline contexts (as a proportion of all their emotion displays) were also
Moral Emotion Attributions and Aggression

more likely to be aggressive than their peers. A very different picture emerged, however, when looking at the emotions children displayed during their aggressive interactions. Targets of aggression were usually angry, and initiators’ emotion displays were equally split between anger and happiness. However, it was only those children who were especially likely to be happy victimizers (as a proportion of their total aggression displays) who were more aggressive and less liked by their peers. By contrast, aggression-related anger was not significantly related to preschoolers’ aggression or their acceptance by peers.

Additional mediation analyses helped to clarify the unique role of these positive aggression-related emotions. Previous research by Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, and Holt (1990) suggested that some of the connections between children’s affective dispositions and acceptance by peers are indirect; that is, preschoolers’ affective tendencies influenced their prosocial behavior and, in turn, prosocial behavior influenced their acceptance by peers. When similar effects were assessed in the present study, it was found that the significant connections between all of the affective correlates of children’s peer acceptance (emotion knowledge, aggression-related happiness, baseline anger, and baseline happiness) were mediated by their aggressiveness. In other words, children’s emotion-related abilities and tendencies were connected to aggression, and this link with aggression accounted for the influence of these affective variables on peer acceptance. The only exception was aggression-related happiness, which had both an indirect link to peer acceptance (through aggression) as well as somewhat of a direct link. In discussing this last finding, we noted that “relatively non-aggressive children may view highly aggressive peers who are often happy during aggression as not taking these typically aversive acts seriously or, even worse, enjoying being mean” (Arsenio et al., 2000, p. 445). It is still unclear, however, whether this happiness stemmed from an actual enjoyment of aggression or the material gains often associated with preschoolers’ aggression (e.g., getting the desired toy or turn without waiting).

Findings from a short-term longitudinal study by Miller and Olson (2000) underscore the importance of children’s observed “happy victimization.” The research participants included 60 4- to 5-year olds from a Head Start center and their teachers. Groups of five children were videotaped during 15-minute free-play sessions once early in the school year and again 9 months later. Teachers and peers used a variety of measures to assess the preschoolers at both time points, and the videotapes were also scored for children’s conflicts and emotion displays. The strongest longitudinal predictor of negative child outcomes was children’s tendency to engage in gleeful taunting at the beginning of the school year, that is, “high intensity inappropriate positive affect” (Miller & Olson, 2000, p. 344) during the videotaped conflicts. In fact, children’s tendency to engage in gleeful taunting accounted for more than six times the variance in a composite measure of children’s problematic behavior than any other emotion variable.

Collectively, the results of these observational studies indicate that many young children exhibit at least some happiness when initiating aggressive behavior. For example, nearly one half of the preschoolers in the Arsenio et al. (2000) study were happy aggressors at least once, although a smaller group (18% of the total sample) committed the majority of all aggressive acts. The observational findings also highlight that observed anger, while important, may be less influential than inappropriate happiness in predicting early childhood aggression, and that dispositional anger (i.e., outside of aggressive interactions, per se) may
play an additional role (see, Arsenio & Lover, 1997). Finally, these findings emphasize the need to focus on individual differences in children’s moral emotion attributions rather than just age-related changes in these attributions. Fortunately, as the research in the next few sections will illustrate, recent research in this area has addressed exactly this issue.

**Individual and Group Differences in Moral Emotion Attributions—Recent Research**

The decade following these early observational and individual/group difference studies has seen significant growth in research linking children’s and adolescents’ moral emotion attributions and their aggressive tendencies. Many of these studies have been conducted by European researchers interested in the social cognitive contributors to various child and adolescent externalizing tendencies, including bullying and delinquency, as well as teacher- and peer-rated aggression. Studies conducted in Italy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996) and Spain (Menesini et al., 2003), for example, have focused on how moral emotion attributions involving shame and guilt (as well as pride and indifference regarding harm) are related to children’s bullying behaviors and moral disengagement patterns. In a related vein, researchers in Switzerland, Germany, and North America have explicitly examined how “happy victimization” and related emotions are connected with the aggressive behaviors of children ranging from kindergarten age through late adolescence (see below). The remainder of this section provides a brief, selective overview of several key representative studies.

**Guilt, Shame, and Moral Disengagement**

Recent moral emotion attribution research in Spain and Italy owes a strong debt to earlier studies by Bandura and his Italian colleagues (Bandura et al., 1996; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001). Initially, Bandura (1990) argued that children and adults engage in aggression and other harmful behaviors, in part, because they are able to obscure or transform their moral responsibility through a variety of distancing mechanisms. Guided by this model, Bandura et al. (1996) developed the 32-item moral disengagement scale to assess eight hypothesized mechanisms of disengagement, such as dehumanization (“some people deserve to be treated like animals”) and displaced responsibility (“kids who get mistreated usually do something to deserve it” [but see Pasaputhi & Wainryb, 2010, regarding current limitations in the conceptualization and assessment of moral disengagement]).

In subsequent research, Bandura et al. (1996, 2001) found that school-aged children with high moral disengagement scores were, in fact, more likely to engage in aggressive and delinquent behaviors. Moreover, some of these connections were affected by children’s tendencies to ruminate on perceived grievances and possible retaliations, as well as by their general level of “irascibility” (e.g., “it doesn’t take much to bug me”). Although neither study directly assessed children’s moral emotion attributions, the 1996 study included a 15-item measure assessing children’s “degree of guilt, remorsefulness, and self-criticism anticipated for transgression conduct” (p. 368). Analyses revealed that moral disengagement fostered aggression and delinquent behavior both by reducing “anticipatory self-censure [lower levels of guilt and reparations] and by promoting cognitive and affective reactions conducive to aggression” (p. 364).
Bandura and colleagues’ efforts to assess connections among moral disengagement, moral emotions (e.g., guilt), and aggression have had a clear influence on several subsequent studies. For example, one especially comprehensive study (Menesini et al., 2003) examined moral emotion attributions in relation to bullying behaviors in first and fourth graders from Seville (Spain) and Florence and Cosenza (Italy). An initial group of more than 1,000 children used the 25-item Participant Role Questionnaire (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996) to assess their peers’ behaviors during bullying episodes (e.g., “starts bullying,” “gets bullied,” and “doesn’t do anything or take sides”). Standardized (Z) scores for these subscales were then used to form three discrete peer groups: bullies (N = 54; high on bullying and low on being victimized); victims (N = 50; high on being victimized and low on bullying); and onlookers (N = 75; unin- volved and low in both bullying and being victimized). These groups were subsequently administered a moral emotion attribution task with 10 stories depicting clear bullying behaviors (e.g., involving victimization and power imbalances between bullies and victims). Participants were asked to imagine themselves in the role of the bully and were asked how they would feel (guilty, ashamed, proud, or indifferent; yes or no for each) and why.

Participants’ emotion attributions were scored separately for the four emotion judgments: emotions of responsibility = expectations of guilt and/or shame across the 10 stories; and emotion disengagement = expectations of either pride or indifference across the 10 stories. In addition, participants’ emotion rationales were scored for moral responsibility motives (e.g., focusing on empathy or bad feelings about oneself) and moral disengagement motives (e.g., explicit lack of empathy or benefits produced by victimization). Scoring was conducted so that emotions of responsibility and disengagement and related moral motives were separable (e.g., a child could say she felt both guilty and proud following an act of bullying). Several revealing findings emerged. Overall (i.e., across all three cities), bullies were more likely than either victims or onlookers to feel emotions of disengagement and to justify these emotions with disengaged rationales. There were, however, no group differences in emotions of responsibility or moral responsibility motives. In other words, bullies were significantly more likely than victims or onlookers to say they would feel proud and/or indifferent following their acts of bullying, and they were more likely to justify these emotions by describing how they benefitted from their victimization or why their bullying was not a problem. Using Menesini et al.’s examples, bullies claimed, “I would feel great because I got the attention of the other children” and “I don’t feel guilty because I don’t think about it” (p. 522).

In a subsequent study, Gini (2006) attempted to clarify these connections between guilt/shame attributions and bullying in a way that has major implications for later sections of this chapter. In brief, Gini was interested in whether the atypical moral attributions associated with bullying are a product of general social cognitive deficits or more specific moral biases. In the words of Sutton, Smith, and Swettenham (1999), are most bullies “social oafs” who behave inappropriately because they misunderstand their social worlds (i.e., reactive aggressors), or are bullies mostly “Machiavellians” (i.e., proactive aggressors), who use their intact social knowledge and skills to pursue immoral ends? (See also Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001, and Crick & Dodge, 1999, on this debate.)

The Gini study began with nearly 600 Italian 8- to 11-year olds completing the Participant Role Questionnaire, and from these peer ratings a number of groups, including
bullies and victims, were identified. The final sample of 204 children was administered a multipart interview that included a shortened version of Bandura’s Moral Disengagement scale, as well as several separate sections including: (a) cognitive stories that assessed children’s understanding of the “mental states, thoughts, beliefs, and intentions of characters” (p. 532); (b) emotion stories that assessed children’s understanding of the typical emotional consequences of nonmoral stories; and (c) moral stories in which one peer victimizes another (e.g., verbal aggression/teasing). Moral responses were scored as correct if the participant’s response suggested the presence of guilt or shame in relation to the specific harm experienced by the victim.

The results revealed that, compared to their peers, bullies scored higher in moral disengagement but did not differ in their social cognitive or emotion-related skills. However, contrary to expectations and previous research, bullies’ moral responses were no different from those of their peers. By contrast, victims of bullying had lower social cognitive scores, suggesting that they may be suffering from some difficulties in understanding their social worlds. Overall, Gini concluded, these results suggest that bullies’ behavior is not the result of an obvious social cognitive deficit: These children understood their social world as well as their peers, and yet still showed high levels of moral disengagement. The lack of differences for moral emotion attributions, Gini argued, could be the result of the specific study methodology (e.g., the focus on moral attributions for hypothetical others rather than for oneself). More generally, this study raises important questions about whether moral emotion attributions need to be distinguished from other social cognitive abilities, and whether most aggressive children, similar to bullies, are really “skilled manipulators” and not just victims of their limited social cognitive abilities.

Happy Victimization and Related Emotion Attributions

This section provides brief summaries of three illustrative studies on happy victimization and related moral emotion attributions, with samples extending from kindergarteners through adolescents up to 19 years of age. In the study with the youngest participants, Malti, Gasser, and Buchman (2009) began by asking, “What types of emotions do aggressive and prosocial children attribute to hypothetical victimizers” (p. 93)? The answer to that question involved nearly 1,500 young participants who were part of a nationally representative, longitudinal study of Swiss children’s social development. Teachers’ ratings were used to identify two groups: children high in aggression (e.g., “this child bullies other children”) or high in prosocial behavior (“this child is helpful if someone is hurt, upset, or feeling ill”) with no permitted overlap in the two groups. The final sample of 235 kindergartners (137 prosocial and 98 aggressive) and 136 first graders (59 prosocial and 77 aggressive) were presented with two moral transgressions (theft of candy and refusal to share a needed pen) and asked to judge whether what the story protagonist did was “right to do” and why, and “how would you feel if you had done that” (as victimizer) and why. Children’s rationales for the two judgments (“was it right/wrong to do ‘x’” and “why would you feel ‘z’”) were coded as: (a) moral—act unfair or harms victim; (b) hedonistic—satisfied own needs; (c) sanction oriented—reference to authority/sanctions; and (d) undifferentiated.

Overall, children judged that it was more acceptable to refuse to share than it was to steal, suggesting that they did not view these acts as completely comparable. In addition, a
number of other more complex age- and gender-related findings emerged. Perhaps most importantly, however, the moral emotion attributions and reasoning of younger (but not older) aggressive children differed systematically from that of younger prosocial children. Compared to their more prosocial peers, younger aggressive children both expected to feel more emotionally positive following transgressions and focused more on potential sanctions when describing why it was not “all right” to engage in moral transgressions. The lack of similar findings for older children, the authors speculated, may have stemmed from children’s increasing awareness of others’ mental states, including a related desire to avoid giving socially undesirable answers. Still, the findings for the younger children highlight the “happy victimizer paradigm . . . as an indicator of the strength of children’s moral motivation” (Malti et al., 2009, p. 98) in relation to children’s aggressive and prosocial behavior.

Findings from a study by Gasser and Keller (2009), among others, suggest that the lack of moral emotion attributions findings in Malti et al.’s older group (mean = 7.6 years) was an exception to a larger pattern. Specifically, Gasser and Keller examined moral emotion attributions and theory of mind–related skills in different groups of Swiss 7- and 8-year old children. A combination of teacher- and child-related ratings (N = 624) was used to identify four groups of children: bullies (N = 54), victims (N = 33), bully victims (N = 80), and prosocial (N = 50). These groups of participants were then administered a moral emotion interview that included four moral transgressions (e.g., stealing candy, bullying a peer, and refusing to share): Children were asked to judge whether it was all right to commit the transgression and why, and how they would feel if they had committed the transgression and why. As in Malti et al. (2009), children’s rationales for the two “why” questions were coded as either moral, authority or sanction oriented, hedonistic, or undifferentiated. Children’s answers for each story were scored for moral knowledge and moral motivation. In addition, a measure of children’s perspective-taking skills was based on a combination of emotion display rule and second-order false-belief understanding.

Comparisons of the four groups revealed that both groups of bullies (bullies and bully victims) scored lower on moral motivation than the prosocial groups. In other words, compared to their prosocial peers, bullies were more likely to expect to feel positive emotions after their moral transgressions and were less likely to explain these emotions with moral explanations. By contrast, older bully victims had lower levels of emotion knowledge than all other groups. Additional analyses revealed significant variability within the behavioral groups in terms of relative deficits in moral motivation versus knowledge, as well as other age- and gender-related variations. Yet, as Gasser and Keller hypothesized, their overall findings confirmed the importance of distinguishing between children’s broader social cognitive skills, such as perspective-taking abilities, and their expected tendency to behave morally. Similar to Gini (2006), these authors noted that bullying and other aggressive behaviors are not just a product of some underlying cognitive “deficits” (Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999): Some children may quite clearly “know the good” without feeling compelled to act on that knowledge (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001).

A final study by Krettenauer and Eichler (2006) suggests that the connections between children’s moral emotion attributions and their aggressive/antisocial behavior extend well beyond elementary school. In that research, Krettenauer and Eichler presented
200 German adolescents from grades 7, 9, 11, and 13 with four moral transgressions (ranging from basic theft to lying to obtain a desirable job) and asked the participants to judge: (a) whether the transgression was “all right” and the certainty of their response; and (b) how they expected to feel if they were the transgressor (on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 = “not bad” to 6 = “very bad”). In addition, adolescents completed a self-report measure of their delinquent behaviors (e.g., shoplifting and “minor forms of fraud and vandalism”), a measure of social desirability, and a complex measure assessing their “meta-ethical stance.”

Analyses revealed that adolescents’ moral emotion attributions predicted their self-reported delinquent tendencies even after accounting for potential social desirability and that these findings did not differ by age. In other words, adolescents who attributed less negative emotions to themselves following moral transgressions reported engaging in more delinquent behavior, and this finding remained significant after controlling for the potential influence of social desirability. At the same time, however, only a small fraction of adolescents (about 8% of the total sample) expected to feel “not bad”—the least negative of the possible emotion attributions—for even one of the four moral transgressions. Krettenauer and Eichler concluded that these findings suggest that “happy victimizers were fairly infrequent in the present sample” (2006, p. 495). Alternatively, however, it can be argued that adolescents were not given the methodological option of attributing positive emotions to themselves as victimizers. Yet despite this gap, less negative self-attributed emotions still predicted delinquency ratings in this normative sample of adolescents.

**Moral Emotion Attributions and Aggression Subtypes**

The previous sections summarized some of the growing evidence on the connections between moral emotion attributions and children’s and adolescents’ aggressive tendencies (see also Malti & Keller, 2009; & Malti, Gasser, & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010, for related findings). In much of the reviewed research, moral emotion attributions were assessed using a mix of stimulus stories involving both acts of overt victimizations (e.g., harming others for gain) and refusing to behave prosocially (e.g., sharing one’s resources), with results collapsed across event types. Yet, despite the predictive validity of this methodological approach, there are important reasons to question its continued utility. Recent findings from two related literatures, in particular, suggest that continued progress in understanding children’s moral emotion attributions will require taking a more differentiated approach to morality and aggression (both in their roles as IVs and DVs).

As noted above, research guided by moral domain theory has consistently shown that children distinguish among the likely emotional consequences of different types of sociomoral events (e.g., Arsenio 1988; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Yell, 2003; Wiersma & Laupa, 2000). Although moral harm, violations of social conventions, and refusal to behave prosocially (among other events) share a common focus on prescriptive interpersonal limits, dozens of studies have shown that children and adults distinguish among these events both conceptually and behaviorally (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006). For example, cross-cultural research has shown that, in many circumstances, participants in both India and the United States consider it more obligatory to avoid harming others than it is to act prosocially for the benefit of others (see, e.g., Miller, 2006, p. 388).
Some moral emotion attribution researchers already distinguish between prosocial and aggressive behavioral tendencies (e.g., Malti et al., 2009). At minimum, future researchers also need to separate the findings for moral harm and prosocial violation emotion attributions. Doing so will make it possible both to examine the extent of the relation between these two types of attributions and to clarify the potentially unique links of these two attribution types with children’s prosocial versus aggressive/immoral behavioral tendencies.

Research from the social information-processing (SIP) approach (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994) also raises important questions about how to conceptualize both children’s moral emotion attributions as well as their aggressive behavioral tendencies. One key question is whether there are different categories of overt harm (especially those involving aggression) and whether separate emotion attributions and behavioral measures are needed for these subcategories of overt aggression. A second concern is more difficult to summarize. In brief, even though (im)morality and aggression seem closely related, they are typically studied as part of two distinctly separate literatures with different theoretical assumption and methodologies. This issue has been discussed at length elsewhere (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001, 2004, 2010), but for the present purposes, it is helpful to distinguish between social cognitions that get stored in long-term memory and how these social cognitions get accessed and applied in the heat of the moment or “online processing” (see, especially, Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004, for more details). To date, most moral emotion attribution research has focused on social cognitions that can be characterized as part of long-term memory (or the “database”). Several studies described below, however, attempt to examine how these longstanding social cognitions might interact with other potentially more dynamic social cognitive processes.

The Reactive/Proactive Distinction

Social information-processing researchers often argue for the importance of distinguishing among several different forms and functions of aggression (e.g., Hubbard, Morrow, Romano, & McAuliffe, 2010). To date, the most studied distinction is the contrast between reactive aggression, in which (mis)perceived threats and frustrations are resisted with aggression, and proactive aggression, in which desirable material or psychological outcomes are obtained by victimizing others (e.g., Dodge & Coie, 1987). In general, children’s reactive aggressive tendencies (e.g., “blames others in a fight” and “overreacts angrily to accidents” [Dodge & Coie, 1987, p. 1149]) are linked with children’s tendency to attribute hostile intentions to others in ambiguous situations, that is, a “hostile attribution bias” (see de Castro, Veerman, Koops, Busch, & Monshouwer, 2002, for a review). Proactive aggressive tendencies (e.g., “threatens and bullies others” and “uses physical force to dominate”), however, are more related to children’s judgments that they are effective at being aggressive and that aggression produces desirable outcomes (“it’s easy and it works”).

Although reactive aggression is often described as “hot-headed” and proactive aggression as “cold-blooded,” empirical research on this emotional distinction—especially as it relates to moral emotion attributions—is relatively limited (although see Hubbard et al., 2002, on observational and physiological emotion differences). One exception to this gap is that children in SIP studies have sometimes been asked to rate how they would feel (from “very bad” to “very good”) after responding aggressively to a peer’s nonaggressive
provocation (such as someone cutting in line). For example, in one influential study (Dodge, Lochman, Harnish, Bates, & Pettit, 1997), “[I]t was the PA [proactive aggressive] group that anticipated more positive interpersonal consequences (i.e., ‘it would feel good inside’) for aggressing than did the other three groups [reactively aggressive, mixed reactive/proactive aggressive, and nonaggressive]” (p. 45). In fact, this was the only SIP measure (out of 7) that was uniquely associated with a particular subtype of aggression. Similarly, in their study of incarcerated delinquent boys, Smithmyer, Hubbard, and Simons (2000) found that more proactively aggressive boys expected to feel more emotionally positive following aggression than did more reactively aggressive boys.

Although typically associated with proactive aggression, “happy victimizer” attributions were also linked with children’s reactive aggressive tendencies in one relatively recent study (de Castro, Merk, Koops, Veerman, & Bosch, 2005). Two groups of 7- to 13-year-old boys participated in that research, including an aggressive group (N = 54) recruited from clinics for behavior problems and a comparison (N = 30) group of nonreferred children from comparable lower to middle SES neighborhoods. Children’s reactive and proactive aggressive tendencies and general behavior problems were assessed by relevant teachers and clinicians. In turn, children were presented with four vignettes involving ambiguous peer provocations (a typical approach for assessing reactive aggressive tendencies). For example, in one story the participant was doing well in a video game when interference by an ambiguously motivated peer caused the participant to lose the game. Children answered a series of questions about the potential “provocateurs’” intentions, and about how they would cope with the situation if it happened to them. In addition, children judged how both they and the “provocateurs” would feel following the ambiguous negative outcome (e.g., the terminated computer game).

As expected, compared to peers, aggressive boys were more likely to attribute hostile intentions to the story provocateurs, to generate aggressive responses to the “provocation,” and to approve of that aggression. Aggressive children’s unique moral emotion attributions, however, provided some additional insights into their underlying reasoning. Following the negative outcome (e.g., losing the computer game), aggressive children, compared to their peers, expected that the provocateur would feel happier and the participant/victim would feel angrier. In other words, aggressive children seemed to be aware of the typical connection between deliberate provoked aggression and positive emotions (happy victimizers). And once the aggressive children judged that a provocation was deliberate, it triggered the usual expected moral emotion attribution, “If he meant to do it and it worked, then he must be happy.”

More recently, my students and I (Arsenio, Adams, & Gold, 2009) have found the most extensive evidence to date linking “happy victimization” attributions to adolescents’ proactive aggressive tendencies. In our study, 100 adolescents (69 boys and 31 girls) from low socioeconomic status (Hollingshead, 1975 = 29.46; SD = 9.49), mostly single-parent (60%) African American and Latino families were administered a multipart interview. Measures included an assessment of verbal ability (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test; Dunn & Dunn, 2001) and separate measures involving adolescents’ likely responses to three different types of aggressive events: (a) ambiguously caused negative outcomes; (b) deliberate but not overtly aggressive provocations (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1996; Dodge et al., 1997); and (c) unprovoked acts of victimization that resulted in clear gains for victimizer (adapted from
Arsenio, Shea, & Sacks, 1995). For all three assessments, adolescents imagined themselves as the main story protagonist, that is, the target of (a) ambiguous and (b) clear peer provocations, and (c) the initiator of an aggressive/immoral act that produced a clear material gain. In addition, high school teachers assessed adolescents’ externalizing behaviors and attentional difficulties using the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991), as well as adolescents’ reactive and proactive aggressive tendencies (Dodge & Coie, 1987).

Several standard social cognitive variables were obtained from adolescents’ responses for the stories involving deliberate and ambiguous provocations. For example, for deliberate provocations (e.g., “a peer cuts in front of you in line”), adolescents had to imagine they had responded aggressively, and they were asked about: (a) the effectiveness of their aggression (would the other child stop?); (b) how easy it was to respond aggressively; and (c) how they would feel after responding aggressively (on a 5-point scale from “very bad” to “very good”). For the ambiguous provocations (e.g., getting hit with a ball but not knowing why), adolescents judged whether they thought the act was intentional and how they expected to feel. And for the last incident, adolescents were described as deliberately victimizing peers for gain (e.g., stealing a desirable jacket), and participants judged how they expected to feel and why, followed by their judgment on how the victim would feel and why. All emotion attributions were followed by an assessment of the degree/intensity of the chosen emotions.

Given the somewhat limited size of the sample, it was not possible to form separate subgroups of reactive and proactive aggressive adolescents. Instead, analyses examined the unique connections between each subtype of aggression (reactive and proactive) and each social cognitive measure, while controlling for the nonfocal form of aggression (see, e.g., de Castro, Merk, Koops & Veerman, & Bosch, 2005; Smithmyer et al., 2000, for a similar approach). Controlling for proactive aggression, adolescents’ greater reactive aggressive tendencies were associated with more hostile attributional biases, greater expected ease in initiating aggression, and lower verbal abilities. By contrast, proactive aggressive tendencies were associated with higher verbal abilities, lower moral concerns about the consequences of unprovoked aggression (i.e., a focus on material gains, rather than fairness), and greater expected happiness following both provoked aggression (as in Smithmyer et al., 2000) and unprovoked victimization (e.g., successfully stealing a desirable jacket). Collectively, there was no overlap in the specific social cognitive variables that were associated with adolescents’ reactive versus their proactive aggressive tendencies. Additional analyses revealed that attention problems mediated the associations between adolescents’ reactive aggressive tendencies and social cognitive biases/deficits (e.g., hostile attributions), but that attention difficulties had no influence on the links between proactive aggression and adolescents social cognitions.

The broader implications of these findings for understanding the distinct moral nature of reactive and proactive aggression have been discussed elsewhere (e.g., Arsenio, 2010). In general, though, the findings are consistent with Arsenio and Lemerise’s claims (2001, 2004) that reactively aggressive children may have problems evaluating the moral intentions of others and yet still believe that it is wrong/unfair to intentionally harm others. Similarly, adolescents’ reactive aggressive tendencies in Arsenio et al. (2009), were associated with greater hostile attributional biases (and attention problems), but not with lower levels of moral reasoning or more immoral emotion attributions (i.e., greater happy victimizer
attributions). The results for proactive aggressive tendencies were also consistent with Arsenio and Lemerise’s previous claims that proactive aggression is not related to social cognitive deficits, per se, but rather to a set of moral values that permit victimizing others for personal gain. So, for example, adolescents’ observed proactive aggressive tendencies were related to more positive emotion attributions following both (unambiguous) provoked and clearly moral (i.e., unprovoked) transgressions, and moral emotion rationales that justified these positive emotions with references to the gains produced by these acts.

Collectively, these studies on the connections between children’s moral emotion and reactive/proactive aggressive tendencies have several implications for future research and theory. One obvious implication is that the reactive/proactive aggression distinction is an important one: To date, “happy/nonguilty” self-attributed moral emotion attributions are more consistently related to children’s and adolescents’ proactively aggressive tendencies than to their reactively aggressive tendencies. Although more research is needed, this attributional pattern appears to support de Castro et al.’s (2005) speculation, “Reactive aggression may be related to unregulated anger, whereas proactive aggression may be related to evocation of positive emotions through aggressive strategies” (p. 123).

A related implication involves researchers’ efforts to understand the psychological processes underlying the growing evidence on the connections between children’s happy/nonguilty moral emotion attributions and aggressive behaviors. Recently, researchers (e.g., Gini, 2006; Gasser & Keller, 2009, among others) have become interested in whether happy/nonguilty moral emotion attributions are mostly a result of (a) social cognitive deficits that make it difficult for some children to understand how victimization harms others; or (b) empathic and “motivational” failures that lead some children to not care that their victimization harms others. The reactive/proactive aggression research summarized in this section suggests that answers to this important question depend, in part, on the specific type of aggression being assessed. Consequently, research attempts to understand the processes underlying the connection between children’s moral emotion attributions and overall aggression—rather than reactive versus proactive aggression—are more likely to be confusing than illuminating.

A final related issue is at once both conceptual and methodological. Most of the stimulus stories used in moral emotions attribution literature involve largely unprovoked acts of victimization or refusals to behave prosocially: acts that either produce clear gains for the perpetrator or reduce potential losses from sharing or helping. These stories are more closely linked to how instrumental, proactive rather than reactive aggression has been conceptualized. Consequently, much of the existing literature on the connections between happy/nonguilty attributions and aggressive tendencies—which has been the focus of this chapter—may be a product of this inadvertent focus on these more proactive, unprovoked acts of aggression. By contrast, take the results of one of the few studies to include events typically associated with reactive aggression. In that research, de Castro et al. (2005) found that aggressive boys both expected to feel angrier than their peers as the “targets” of ambiguously caused provocations, while also attributing more positive emotions and deliberate intentions to the supposed “instigators” of those events. Studies by Astor (1994) and Smetana et al. (2003) also underscore the importance of examining children’s moral emotion attributions in contexts involving provocation and retaliation.
The past decade has seen significant growth in research on the connections between children's moral emotion attributions and aggressive behaviors. As the studies in this selective review of the literature illustrate, children's and adolescents' expectations that moral victimizers will feel either relatively happy or less negative following transgressions are consistently related to more aggressive behavior, delinquency, and broad externalizing tendencies. Moreover, results from Malti and Krettenauer's recent meta-analysis (2013) confirm the strength of this connection while also highlighting the importance of several methodological moderators. Specifically, Malti and Krettenauer found that the already significant overall connection between children's moral emotion attributions and aggression increased significantly in studies when participants (a) judged their own likely emotions as transgressors rather than those of hypothetical others; and (b) could rate the intensity/degree of victimizers' emotion reactions rather than just choosing discrete emotion responses. With overall effect sizes of between $d = 0.40$ to $0.56$, the authors concluded that the magnitudes of the links between moral emotion attributions and aggression "are similar to those found in other studies on empathy and social behavior” (p. 25).

The discussion of moral emotion attributions in this chapter reflects the changing views regarding their nature and importance. Initially, researchers asked whether moral emotion attributions differed with age, whether these attributions mostly reflected underlying cognitive abilities or methodological quirks, and whether they really matter. With the growing evidence that these attributions really do matter, the important questions have begun to change to “What do these moral emotion attributions mean?” and “What do they tell us about the complex nature of children's (im)moral development?” A tentative answer to the first question might take us back to Asendorph and Nunner-Winkler's (1992) initial hypothesis: “[T]he extent to which children attribute emotions in a morally appropriate way to hypothetical protagonists in moral conflicts is a good empirical indicator of the strength of children’s moral motive, that is, for their readiness to abide by the moral rules they understand to be valid” (pp. 1223–1224). Overall, the research reviewed in this chapter lends strong support to this idea that moral emotions capture some critical aspect of children's and adolescents' moral motivational tendencies.

It is less clear, however, precisely what this evidence tells us about the underlying nature of children's (im)moral development. For example, available research suggests that aggressive children certainly know the rules prohibiting aggression, but it is less clear whether these children always view these rules as both valid and personally binding. Results from some studies suggest that questions about the validity and binding nature of rules may depend, in part, on the particular type of aggressive act and/or the aggressive status of the participant involved. For example, more reactively aggressive children may view moral rules as both valid and binding and yet often (mis)judge their own aggression as provoked and therefore legitimate. Most of the moral emotion literature, however, focuses on clearly unprovoked acts of aggression that are more likely to capture the attributions of children with proactive aggressive tendencies. For example, proactive aggression in the Arsenio et al. (2009) study was associated with greater expected happiness following moral transgressions and victimizer rationales focusing on the gains produced by intentional victimization. By contrast, proactive aggression was not linked with social cognitive deficits (e.g., a hostile
attributional bias), attentional problems, or any clear attempt to minimize the harm for
victims.

How can we explain the moral emotion attributions and behaviors of children who
seem to know moral rules, understand their validity, and yet not feel compelled to behave
in accordance with these rules? One approach focuses on the role of moral disengagement
(Bandura, 1990). As summarized above, children’s tendencies to obscure or deny their
moral responsibility (e.g., by dehumanizing others or defusing personal volition) leads to
both greater aggression and more problematic moral attributions. Another approach (Ar-
senio & Gold, 2006) acknowledges the importance of social cognitive processes, including
moral disengagement, while also focusing on the potential environmental origins of chil-
dren’s atypical and problematic social cognitions. For example, in their discussion of the
effects of political violence on moral agency, Wainryb and Pasupathi (2010) argue that so-
cially toxic environments “might undermine both children’s abilities to believe that justice
and welfare truly matter and their motivation to consider these issues in making choices”
(p. 50; see also, Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005). Evidence already exists, for example, that
greater neighborhood disadvantage and lower perceived safety (Fite, Wynn, Lochman, &
Wells, 2009; Fite et al., 2010) are uniquely related to increased proactive but not reactive
aggression in children. What is missing from the aggression and moral emotion attribu-
tion literature, then, is research that examines both the within-child contributors to these
relations (e.g., ToM abilities, empathic tendencies) as well as the systemic contributions of
the larger social environment to children’s social cognitions and behavior.

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Moral Emotion Attributions and Aggression


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Part IV

Culture, Cooperation, and Development
Foundations: Perspectives on Moral Development and Moral Diversity

The propositions that persons develop in cultures and that cultural arrangements frame their moral lives are not controversial. Deep disagreements do exist, however, concerning what cultures are like and what it means to say that culture frames moral development. Divergent views on those issues translate, in turn, into critically different understandings of the nature of the diversity of moral experiences across cultures.

Our perspective on moral development in culture is grounded in a developmental theory that posits that persons develop moral and other social concepts through participation in and reflection on social interactions of different kinds (Turiel, 1998). It is also informed by a view of cultures (e.g., Gjerde, 2004) as historical constructs created and sustained in the context of collaborations, disagreements, power clashes, and contested meanings among individuals—men and women, adults and children, haves and have-nots. We thus hold that cultures are multifaceted environments that offer people opportunities for diverse kinds of social interactions. Rather than being products of their culture and exchangeable copies of other members of their culture, people in cultures try to make sense of their experiences, disagree with one another about the meanings and value of these experiences, assume critical roles toward them and, at times, attempt to resist or subvert their culture’s norms and practices, and may even succeed in changing them.

This perspective contrasts with propositions centered on the cultural determination of development—propositions typically grouped under the broad umbrella of “cultural psychology” (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003; Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993). Although those propositions differ from one another in meaningful ways, they also share key assumptions about culture and development that are of consequence to the study of moral development in culture. From the viewpoint of cultural psychology, cultures are all-embracing constructs that form relatively coherent patterns of thought and action, with the patterns of one culture differing from another. Persons are predisposed to participate in culture and to accept and reproduce their culture’s main features. Thus, the psychology of individuals is said to be structured in...
accord with the culture’s dominant pattern or orientation. The dominant cultural pattern is communicated to the members of a culture via a number of mechanisms, such as explicit instruction (Kitayama, Conway, Pietromonaco, Park, & Plaut, 2010), exposure to cultural messages conveyed through avenues such as the media and literature (Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008), and participation in cultural practices and socially prescribed forms of behavior (Rogoff, 1990). The end result of these processes is assumed to be that members of cultures form a shared commitment to goals and values—indeed, a shared “culture.”

The notion of coherent patterns of cultural organization is best exemplified by the proposition that societies can be broadly sorted into individualistic or collectivistic cultures. According to this formulation, cultures with an individualistic orientation (e.g., the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand) structure social experience around autonomous persons, relatively detached from their relationships and community, and motivated to attain freedom and personal goals. Cultures whose core is collectivistic (e.g., much of Asia, Africa, and South America) are thought to structure social experience around collectives such as the family or the community; thus, members of collectivistic cultures are identified largely by their interdependent roles and by the duties prescribed to them by the social system (Kitayama et al., 2007; Triandis, 2007). Individualistic and collectivistic cultures are also thought to maintain fundamentally divergent conceptions of morality (Miller, 2007; Shweder et al., 2006). Morality in individualistic cultures is said to be rights-based and structured by concerns with furthering and protecting the independence and personal choice of the individual. Collectivistic cultures are thought to have an interdependent and duty-based morality structured around the expectations, rules, and duties stemming from a person’s role in the social system.

Although the construct of individualism/collectivism has enjoyed tremendous popularity as a model of cultural variability in human thought, emotion, and behavior, and generated a great deal of research across many societies and across a wide array of domains (for reviews, see Oyserman & Sorensen, 2009; Triandis, 2007), its focus on differences between cultures has led to the downplaying of differences within cultures. Entire societies (indeed, entire continents) have been characterized according to their presumably uniform orientation to individualism or collectivism, to rights or duties, or to independence or interdependence. This emphasis on cultural homogeneity has become the target of criticism by anthropologists and developmental psychologists, who have argued that autonomy and interdependence are not mutually exclusive but interwoven in development, coexisting in the thoughts and actions of people in all societies (Gjerde, 2004; Spiro, 1993; Turiel, 2002; Turiel & Wainryb, 2000; Wainryb, 1997, 2004). Furthermore, a meta-analysis of both cross-national research and research conducted in the United States between 1980 and 2001 (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002) confirmed that differences between “individualistic” and “collectivistic” societies are neither large nor systematic and that societies and individuals cannot be accurately characterized in terms of a single orientation.

Over the years, descriptions of cultures as either individualistic or collectivistic gave way to portrayals allowing a mixture of individualistic and collectivistic elements. In one formulation, cultures are depicted as reflecting particular setpoints on each of the dimensions of individualism and collectivism. For example, Asian societies are characterized as high on collectivism and low on individualism, and Latin American societies are characterized as high on both individualistic and collectivistic values (Oyserman & Sorensen, 2009).
In another increasingly common formulation, group differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures are tempered by simultaneous references to individual variability within cultures as measured by individual scores on measures of individualism and collectivism (Oyserman & Uskul, 2008). For example, in a recent study, Genyue, Heyman, and Lee (2011) reported that, as would befit members of a collectivistic culture, intent on deflecting attention from the individual and promoting harmonious group relations, Chinese adolescents and adults judged lying in the service of modesty more favorably than their American counterparts. Nevertheless, within each cultural group, individuals who scored higher on collectivism and lower on individualism were more likely to make more positive evaluations of this type of modesty-promoting behavior.

Whereas both of these types of formulations wrestle with the complexity of societies in a way that the individualism/collectivism dichotomy did not, they nevertheless retain the original top-down assumption about the transmission and acquisition of values. For example, to the extent that cultural analyses recognize heterogeneity within societies, they tend to account for this variability by pointing to smaller cultural communities or subcultures within societies (e.g., urban versus rural, working class versus middle class, liberal versus conservative; Graham et al., 2011; Wiley, Rose, Burger, & Miller, 1998), but these smaller subcultures are still viewed as having a dominant and relatively homogeneous core of shared meanings, values, traditions, and practices (or “cultural syndromes”; Oyserman & Sorensen, 2009), and individual psychology continues to be organized primarily in line with dominant (though potentially more varied) cultural frameworks. In other words, persons are still locked into enacting their cultures’ scripts.

Furthermore, despite the emergence of these more nuanced formulations, the field continues to rely largely on global characterizations of societies in terms of dominant individualistic and/or collectivistic cultural orientations. Over 1,000 studies have cited Triandis’s (1995) seminal work on individualism and collectivism; in the last 10 years alone, over 650 studies examining various aspects of children’s and adolescents’ experiences and nearly 300 studies examining morality have been published that included references to “individualism” and/or “collectivism.” Thus, because much research in this area continues to rely on the premise that the goals and perspectives of individuals within cultures are shaped by their culture’s dominant orientation, theme, or syndrome, the possibility that individuals within a culture may develop contradictory perspectives and enter into significant conflict with each other is rarely a central consideration. And, most important, although cultural psychologists often speak about human agency (e.g., Miller, Das, & Chakravarthy, 2011; Shweder, 2003), their analyses neglect to specify the developmental processes by which individuals might come to resist, or even disagree with, cultural norms and practices. This tendency is unlikely to be an oversight, as the emphasis on the cultural shaping of psychological processes necessarily overestimates the power of culture to dictate meanings and underestimates individual agency.

And yet, as we shall show below, the view of cultures as characterized by a tendency toward a shared voice is not consistent with evidence pointing to the substantial plurality of concerns of persons within cultures, to the conflicts and disagreements among persons within cultures, and to the multiple interpretations and critical judgments that persons make about their culture’s norms and practices. Importantly, moreover, this type of heterogeneity cannot be fully accounted for by formulations emphasizing the
cultural determination or patterning of development—not even those that allow for the coexistence of multiple cultural templates. As discussed more fully in the next sections, explanations of cultural heterogeneity require more than estimating where cultures fall on the collectivistic–individualistic continuum or identifying particular cultural subgroups within societies, because such explanations do not provide an adequate developmental account of the emergence and presence of substantial variability both within and between persons within societies. Thus, in the developmentally grounded perspective on morality and culture we present below, the analysis shifts away from the cultural patterning of development to focus instead on the diverse experiences of persons within culture.

But before we leave them behind, it is important to acknowledge that propositions emphasizing the cultural patterning of social and moral development are often seen as an essential response for countering the presumed ethnocentricity and Western biases of explanations that emphasize universal characteristics. Indeed, it is likely that the persistent popularity of explanations based on cultural differences is tied to the fact that these explanations are often perceived as advancing a richer view of human development. And yet, propositions focused exclusively on differences between cultures fail to account for the full range of human diversity and cannot plausibly constitute a robust basis for the promotion of respect for human diversity and justice. Indeed what is seldom acknowledged by those concerned with the cultural patterning of development is their tacit presumption that each culture has only one distinctive point of view, one insider perspective, one local voice. Those propositions, furthermore, highlight participation in culture and acceptance of cultural norms and practices, including those dictated by hierarchical arrangement, while inevitably making light of the possibility that some members of cultures might dislike, resent, oppose, resist, and wish to change some aspects of their culture, and may even serve as agents of cultural change. Inescapably, therefore, the reliance on the notions of culture and cultural differences as the main anchors of human diversity leads to overlooking the experiences of some of the very groups and individuals within cultures that the notion of culture is presumed to give voice to.

In what follows, we present an alternative perspective that points to developmental processes in contested cultural landscapes as the source of the multiple and conflicting social and moral points of view found within cultures. We conclude by considering how an acknowledgment of heterogeneity and conflict within cultures can generate new questions about divergent moral–developmental trajectories in different societies.

**Review of Research: Moral Life in Contested Cultural Landscapes**

Within all societies, people, including children, participate in social interactions that bear on matters as diverse as justice, social roles, individual rights, interpersonal obligations, and friendship. In the process, they develop distinct concerns and understandings about their social world. Because social interactions and social systems are often conflict-ridden, persons occupying different social positions often develop goals, interests, and perspectives that come into conflict with each other. A large body of research has yielded reliable evidence concerning the multifaceted social and moral experiences of children and adults in different cultural settings. Although research was first conducted largely in North America, to date studies have been conducted in many countries in Asia, Africa, and...
Central and South America. Two distinct, though related and mutually informative, sets of findings provide evidence that bears on the heterogeneity of moral life within cultures and to the developmental roots of such heterogeneity. One set of findings documents the multiple social and moral concerns that persons across cultures develop, and the diverse ways in which persons weigh those concerns as they make sense of specific social contexts within their cultures. The other set of findings points to conflicts between individuals within cultures that stem from differences in perspectives, agendas, and power. A view of persons—including children—as agents capable of reflection and interpretation, likely to engage in cooperation with others as well as in conflict and subterfuge, underlies both sets of findings.

**Individuals Across Cultures Develop Multiple Social and Moral Concerns**

The diversity of children’s social and moral concerns has been amply documented in a large number of societies around the world. Extensive research carried out in North America has demonstrated that children begin to form differentiated social concepts at an early age. Starting in the preschool years, children develop concerns with autonomy, entitlements, and rights (Nucci, 2001)—concerns that might be thought of as individualistic. Further, in studies conducted in the United States, Canada, and Europe, children as young as 6 or 7 years conceptualized freedoms of speech and religion as universal moral rights, which hold across cultural contexts even in the face of laws denying these rights, and they explained these judgments on the basis of human agency and personal choice (Helwig, 2006; Helwig & McNeil, 2011).

Yet in spite of the centrality that notions of personal autonomy and rights have for children in Western societies, research has reliably shown that children are also concerned with issues that cannot be characterized as individualistic, such as the well-being of others, justice, and fairness (Turiel, 1998). Moreover, children in these cultures also develop collectivistic-like concerns with authority and obedience, social roles, and conventions, as well as with interpersonal obligations (Smetana, 2013).

When social interactions bear simultaneously on concerns with the individual (personal choice, rights, autonomy) and the collective (obedience, group interests), North American children do not merely place individualistic goals ahead of group goals. Instead, they appraise the features of specific contexts and make judgments that give priority to “individualistic” concerns in some situations and to “collectivistic” concerns in others. North American children (and adults) often uphold personal autonomy and rights, but are also responsive to other features of social situations and, in many contexts, subordinate concerns with autonomy and rights to considerations with the prevention of harm to others (Helwig, 2006), interpersonal obligations (e.g., Smetana et al., 2009), and group goals (Killen, 2007).

Similar findings were observed among members of so-called collectivistic societies where one might have expected that concerns with autonomy and individual rights would be systematically subordinated to the maintenance of social harmony, hierarchy, and traditional roles and duties. A substantial body of research in Asia (e.g., China [Helwig, 2006; Yau, Smetana & Metzger, 2009]; India [Neff, 2001], Japan [Crystal, 2000]), the Middle East (Wainryb, 1995), and Africa (e.g., Benin [Conry, 2004]), has demonstrated that
children in these societies form a mixture of judgments on the dimensions of morality, social convention, and interpersonal obligation, while also maintaining concepts of persons as autonomous agents with choices and rights.

The conceptualization of persons in these “collectivistic” cultures as autonomous agents, with personal choices and entitlements, is of particular importance because of the common presumption that members of such societies form sociocentric and interdependent judgments that override concerns with personal autonomy and independence. In contrast to this view, research has demonstrated that persons in societies that are described as collectivistic or interdependent develop concepts of personal agency including a sense of self and personal goals and interests. For example, 4- and 6-year olds in Hong Kong systematically distinguished between realms of experience over which they thought parents should have authority and realms which they thought should be outside parental and societal regulation and subject exclusively to personal discretion (Yau & Smetana, 2003a); similar findings were obtained with children and adolescents in Chile (Darling, Cumsille, & Loreto Martinez, 2008), India (Neff, 2001), Japan (Crystal, 2000), and China (Helwig & McNeil, 2011). Furthermore, research has shown that children and adults in such societies also develop concepts of individual rights and freedoms, and uphold those rights even in the face of authority and other collective concerns (Helwig, 2006; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998). Indeed, the surge of revolutionary demonstrations, protests, and uprisings erupting at the end of 2010 across Northern Africa and the Middle East (termed the “Arab Spring”) dramatically illustrates that a desire for democracy and protection of individual rights are far from being concerns that are exclusively held by individuals in Western societies.

When considered as a whole, research indicates that persons in cultures that are described as collectivistic do judge in accord with roles, duties, and traditions in the social system, but also have a pervasive sense of persons as independent agents, with autonomy, entitlements, and rights. They draw boundaries on the jurisdiction of authority, and are aware of personal choice and rights as components of their social interactions. In exercising personal autonomy, they weigh their freedoms against other social considerations, such as the goals of the group, the welfare of others, and the hierarchical roles in the cultural system—revealing a complex picture of priorities and preferences.

The findings considered in this section indicate that children and adults across societies develop multiple social and moral concerns, and that they apply those concerns differently in different social contexts, giving priority sometimes to autonomy and rights and sometimes to tradition and social harmony. This within-culture variability can be best explained by recognizing that children (and adults) across cultures actively appraise the features of the social contexts in which they participate, and make judgments that vary systematically in accord to the meanings and interpretations they attribute to those contexts. In support of this view, research demonstrates that when children (and adults) make social and moral judgments, they do so in reference to their interpretations of specific features of social contexts. For example, when children consider experiences of harm and injustice, their moral judgments vary as a function of their perspective as victim or perpetrator (Wainryb, Brebl, & Matwin, 2005; Wainryb, Komolova, & Brebl, 2011), their interpretation of the relevant facts of the event (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010; Shaw & Wainryb, 2006; Wainryb & Brebl, 2004; Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam, & Lewis, 2004), or their relationship history with
particular interaction partners (Recchia, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, in press). Although much of this evidence comes from research conducted with children and adolescents in North America, recent studies of youth in Eastern Europe (Daiute, 2010), Latin America (Posada & Wainryb, 2008), and the Middle East (Hammack, 2011) reveal similar patterns of variability in youths’ perspectives across contexts, which can similarly be explained by accounting for how young people make sense of particular interpersonal experiences.

In sum, an accumulating body of evidence suggests that, rather than passively absorbing and enacting cultural scripts, children (and adults) across cultures are active agents who strive to make sense of their experiences. For this reason, we argue that children across cultures can be characterized as flexible in their approach to their social experiences and relationships (Turiel, 2002): weighing and attempting to coordinate concerns with autonomy and rights, with group goals, harmony, and tradition, and with human welfare and justice, thus arriving at varied understandings as they construct meanings about the wide range of experiences that they encounter in their everyday lives.

In addition to accounting for persons’ varied reasoning and judgments across situations, the view that people within cultures flexibly construct understandings of their social worlds also implies that, in some situations, different individuals within any one culture will arrive at divergent interpretations or evaluations of particular experiences, practices, cultural arrangements, and historical events. In the next section, we elaborate on how these conflicts may stem from differences in agendas, perspectives, and power within cultures.

### Individuals Within Cultures Develop Conflicting Perspectives

Cultural practices and traditions are not authentic representations of the past handed down from one generation to the next; they are continuously shaped, contested, and changed in the context of overt and covert conflicts (Gjerde, 2004; Wikan, 2002). Thus, social life in cultures includes not only identification with and harmonious participation in cultural practices, but also disagreements about what is right and valuable. As mentioned above, persons across societies carve up a realm of personal goals and interests, and strive to achieve and maintain control over their own goals and interests even in the face of competing social considerations. It makes sense, therefore, that in addition to developing shared understandings about aspects of their culture, persons occupying different roles or positions would interpret some of their experiences differently; develop competing goals, interests, and perspectives; and sometimes find themselves in conflict with each other. Indeed, research in a variety of societies reveals a plethora of sources of conflict within cultures, including disagreements and clashes that stem from perspective and power differences related to age, gender, race, and economic circumstances, to name just a few examples.

First, the literature described above on children’s development of social and moral concerns amply reveals that their expanding sphere of personal autonomy and choice is demarcated largely in the context of conflicts, tensions, and negotiations with authority figures such as parents. Even at the age of 4 or 5, children negotiate with parents over issues they believe to be within their own personal jurisdiction, and view adult rules and intervention surrounding these matters to be illegitimate (Smetana, 2013). By
adolescence, youths increasingly challenge the legitimacy of their parents’ control over matters such as their personal appearance, cleaning their room, and curfew (Smetana, 2005) and tend not to disclose to their parents issues they consider to be in the personal domain (e.g., Smetana, Villalobos, Tasopoulos-Chan, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2009). And, although overt conflict between children and their parents in some societies may be more muted (i.e., less frequent and less intense) than that observed in North American samples (Smetana, 2002), children around the world have conflicts with their parents about similar issues (e.g., Assadi, Smetana, Shahmansouri, & Mohammadi, 2011; Yamada, 2008; Yau & Smetana, 2003b), following from their beliefs that some issues should be outside parental regulation and subject exclusively to personal discretion.

Conflicts between younger and older people within cultures may also concern issues implicating rights, discrimination, and respect for persons. Young people in Western societies have disagreements with their parents’ generation about issues related to homosexuality (Savin-Williams, 2005), abortion (Scott, 1998), economic inequality (ter Bogt, Meeus, Raaijmakers, Van Wel, & Vollebergh, 2009), and environmental protection (Blanchet-Cohen, 2010), to name just a few examples. Indeed, a well-established literature on youth agency and political activism recognizes that young people have the capacity to be engaged citizens with their own unique views on political issues that are not necessarily concordant with those of their parents (e.g., Gordon, 2008), and which are often discrepant with mainstream political views (e.g., Lax & Phillips, 2009). Research in so-called collectivistic societies similarly reveals youths’ capacity for critical views of the political actions and beliefs of their parents’ generation, as well as their involvement in activism, leading to clashes with both their parents and the established authorities of their societies (Barber, 2009; Daiute, 2010; Hammack, 2011; Wainryb, 2011a). Indeed, observers of the wave of political protests in the Arab world that began late in 2010 have commented that youth played a central role in many such uprisings (Hvistendahl, 2011).

In addition to clashes between parents and children and between younger and older generations, research further reveals that different groups of people within cultures construct divergent meanings of the same experiences. Research has shown, for example, that groups of children who are habitually the targets of unfair or hurtful treatment are particularly sensitive to the consequences of such behavior. For example, in studies conducted in the United States, African American children were more likely than European American children to explain their negative judgments of exclusion by referring to the undesirable consequences for society when individuals discriminate on the basis of race (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002; see also Flanagan, Syvertsen, Gill, Gallay, & Cumsille, 2009), and girls were more likely than boys to be concerned with fairness and equal access to groups (Killen & Stangor, 2001). Not inconsistent with the patterns observed within children’s peer groups, the construction of divergent meanings about the circumstances of different groups of adults within cultures are fundamentally intertwined with political, economic, and social implications that follow from the prestige, power, and influence that are associated with particular roles within specific cultures. For this reason, conflicts between adults within cultures often take the form of disagreements between the dominant views of those in power and individuals in more subordinate positions.

In Western societies, these types of clashes are evident in the ubiquity of social movements challenging existing arrangements bearing on racial, economic, and gender relations
Yet the presence of organized protest is certainly not limited to Western societies (e.g., Broadbent & Brockman, 2010; Petras, 2011; Stephan, 2009; UNESCO, 1994), and discontent or dissent with cultural practices across all cultures may also take less organized forms, whereby persons challenge cultural meanings in everyday life through overt and covert activities (Turiel, 2002). As examples, Bumiller’s (1990) account of the perspectives of women in India, Goodwin’s (1994) interviews with women in Islamic countries, and Mernissi’s (1994) account of women’s life in a harem in Morocco, show that women in these societies are aware of the burdens and injustices they experience as a consequence of cultural practices that accord men control over them. Abu Lughod’s (1993) ethnographic studies of Bedouin women in Egypt and Chen’s (1995) work in Bangladesh and India illustrate the many ways in which persons in these societies deliberately disobey and subvert practices they consider unfair, such as arranged marriages, polygamy, and traditions restricting employment for women and people of lower social castes. Research with youths and adults in the Druze community in northern Israel (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994) shows that girls and women in this patriarchal and hierarchically organized society often adhere to cultural practices not only out of commitment to their culture or endorsement of its values, but also out of fear of the consequences likely to ensue from failure to do so. For example, Druze women and girls expressed their fear that a disobeying wife might be thrown out of her house, divorced against her will, or prevented from seeing her children. These examples, in turn, suggest that even participation in “shared” cultural practices and traditions may conceal struggles over meaning, disagreement, or discontent.

Altogether, this research shows that to understand moral and social development, it is not sufficient to attend to the perspectives that are predominant in a culture’s public discourse; rather, the heterogeneity of perspectives present within a culture must be represented. Doing so serves to document the contested nature of social and moral life within cultures. Clearly, although most people across societies like and identify with many of their culture’s practices, expectations, and traditions and willingly participate in them, people—including children—also often dislike, disagree with, and even resent some of their culture’s practices, expectations, and traditions. At times they defy them openly and other times they subvert them covertly; at times they go along out of fear, and other times they get together with others and fight to bring about changes. Whereas some of these disagreements, conflicts, and deceptions carry only the risk of temporary distress or relatively minor physical or material consequences, in other cases resistance can entail very serious risks or long-term repercussions. Dissenting individuals and groups in all societies sometimes endanger their livelihoods and lives by openly defying restrictive practices, traditions, and expectations, making demands, forming alliances with others, and engaging in confrontations, including physical confrontations. Furthermore, while one might minimize the relevance that disagreements and conflicts between parents and their young children have for understanding cultural heterogeneity by referring to the fact that youths are not yet fully socialized into their culture, it would be harder, and indeed misguided, to use such an argument to dismiss the significance—to individuals and cultures—of generational disagreements and conflicts (Ginwright & James, 2002). And referring to incomplete socialization would clearly not do away with the significance of disagreements among adult members of a culture.
Cultural psychologists, however, have made light of opposition and resistance, particularly in the context of societies said to endorse collectivistic or interdependent values. Indeed, although they acknowledge that persons in dissenting or subordinate positions in these societies sometimes express discontent with their lives, complain about the burdens imposed on them because of their social position, and engage in behaviors meant to communicate their dissatisfaction, cultural psychologists often deny that such behaviors implicate genuine concerns or opposition, and especially deny that they are meant to challenge or subvert fundamental aspects of cultural norms and practices (Menon & Shweder, 1998; Miller, 2001). In this respect, cultural analyses trivialize the perspectives and experiences of those who occupy dissenting positions, especially in so-called collectivistic societies. They overlook the very real pain afflicting them, the genuineness and legitimacy of their resentment and anger, the seriousness of their engagement, and the complexity of their moral commitments. Dismissing or minimizing the perspectives of those in dissenting positions, however, might be an unavoidable element of psychological theories that view participation in culture, and identification and compliance with culture, as explanations for development. The judgments and behaviors of diverse persons and groups within societies, including the evidence pointing to discontent, resistance, opposition, and subversion, reveal the deep understanding that persons across the world have of their personal goals, entitlements, and autonomy, as well as their concern with justice and rights. They also reveal the willingness and readiness, on the side of those in dissenting positions, to participate in the life of their communities while also engaging in cultural critique.

Current and Future Directions: Cultural Differences Revisited

Collectively, the research reviewed in the previous sections underscores that social and moral development is not merely “determined” by culture. Children and adults do not uniformly endorse the values and practices characteristic of their own societies; even when a culture’s public discourse elevates the collective over the individual, or vice versa, people across all cultures develop a variety of social and moral goals and concerns that reflect a consideration of both individual and collective interests. For this reason, although children and adults typically participate in their culture’s traditions and accept many of their culture’s norms and practices, they also reflect on these traditions, norms, and practices. They may resist and try to change some of them and even come into conflict with other members of their culture over their differing perspectives or agendas vis-à-vis issues regulated by their culture. This body of research also demonstrates that these differing positions about cultural values and practices are not simply resolved as youths grow up and become successfully “enculturated,” but are encountered over and over again (albeit in different ways) as children become adult members of their societies. Following from this, as children grow up, they do not move progressively closer to becoming interchangeable members of their society, embodying the same culturally determined ideals, values, practices, and norms, but rather remain capable of opposing, contesting, and subverting (in addition to sometimes accepting, endorsing, and even enforcing) cultural meanings and traditions.

In this respect, people’s moral engagements and moral lives within their cultures embody the sort of complexity and heterogeneity that is not captured by a unidimensional cultural orientation to individualism or collectivism, or even by depictions of cultures
as comprising a combination of individualistic and collectivistic elements. The perspective on within-culture heterogeneity presented in this chapter also diverges from recent cultural psychology models that measure the extent to which different individuals within societies endorse dominant cultural values such as individualism and collectivism. Instead, our perspective considers the implications of multifaceted experiences that inevitably occur in everyday life, as individuals (young and old) engage in flexible attempts to weigh concerns for both self and others, with their own rights as well as duties, and with both social–conventional norms and the desire for autonomy.

As we have reviewed above, the body of research devoted to understanding social and moral development in cultures has thus far focused its attention on delineating these universal sources of heterogeneity within cultures, in an effort to establish the constructive developmental processes at work in all societies. We have documented here that people's moral lives within all cultures are complex and heterogeneous. The question that this research has not yet addressed is whether it matters to a person's moral life and engagement whether she or he grows up in New York City, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, or Mumbai. We believe the short answer to this question is yes. We also believe that this question charts a critical future direction for research that recognizes multiple sources of heterogeneity within cultures. Importantly, future research that poses these questions in a developmentally grounded way need not throw us back into the cultural determination of meanings and development: Rather, such research can help us to better understand what it means for active and reflective agents to grow up and live and function and make decisions in very different societies, under very different circumstances.

As discussed above, our own and others' research has shown that people growing up in societies that constrain personal autonomy and individual rights do, nevertheless, develop personal goals, are aware that their societies' traditions and norms impose constraints on their autonomy, and even judge these restrictions to be unfair. And yet this same research also demonstrates that people's decisions and experiences are influenced by these restrictions, and thus their life courses and opportunities are fundamentally affected by their societies' mores. For instance, adult men and women from all strata of Indian society (Mines, 1988) describe themselves as having occupational interests and economic goals separate from the goals of their social group, and many describe such goals as being in clear opposition to societal expectations; yet most report postponing their goals until later in life, when the consequences of asserting their autonomy were less extreme (e.g., when disinheritance was no longer a threat). Similarly, even when they judge the greater restrictions imposed on them to be unfair, Druze women describe deferring to the wishes of their husbands and fathers to avoid the dire consequences to their own welfare that they fear might follow from their failure to acquiesce (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994). Another example concerns the patterns of adolescent–parent conflict that characterize different groups of American families. Although all adolescents report desiring more autonomy from parents, especially surrounding personal issues (Yau & Smetana, 2003b), adolescents from Chinese and Mexican backgrounds tend to discuss these issues with their parents less frequently than adolescents from European background because of their awareness of the potential consequences of disclosing such information to parents, including lack of understanding and strong disapproval (Yau, Tasopoulos–Chan, & Smetana, 2009). As a whole, these various lines of research suggest that although concerns with justice and with autonomy are present in all societies,
in societies that are organized more restrictively, these concerns become manifested differently in the range of choices that people perceive to be prudent, practical, or even possible.

Our argument, however, is that it is essential to go further, by asking how such differences might alter the sociomoral–developmental trajectories of children and adults. For instance, to the extent that people perceive that they cannot make and enact their choices, and judge that they have limited opportunity to experience the rights and freedoms that they desire and that they often feel they should be entitled to, might this have implications for their continued sociomoral development? In what ways, if any, are children's and adults' developing sense of themselves and others as moral agents impacted by their perception of a fundamental disconnect between how things are and how they ought to be? Might these processes have implications for how children and adults use the variety of moral and social concepts at their disposal to make sense of their own and others' behavior? And, assuming that a culture curtails the freedoms or range of choices of only some of its members, it also bears asking about the implications of this for others who are free to enact their own preferences but witness on a daily basis the consequences for those—their mothers, their sisters, their classmates, their neighbors—who do not enjoy the same degree of freedom.

None of these moral–developmental questions have been directly addressed in an empirical fashion with regard to societies that differ in the extent to which they regulate and constrain the autonomy of individuals. Nevertheless, a number of studies provide suggestive evidence that specific features of societal contexts may in fact influence in nontrivial ways children's moral understandings of their own lived experiences. To draw on an example from our own work (Posada & Wainryb, 2008; Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2008), we have observed distinct moral understandings among displaced youth in Colombia who have been directly affected by their ongoing experiences of war, political violence, and injustice. In line with the body of research reviewed in this chapter, war-displaced children in Colombia did develop moral concepts similar to those espoused by youth from community samples in the United States; they made noncontingent and universal negative moral judgments about stealing and hurting others, and justified these judgments on the basis of concerns with justice and welfare. Yet these youths also thought these principles were largely inconsistent with the pervasiveness of stealing and hurting that they observed and experienced in their everyday lives. Thus, although they had a sense of what was right and wrong, they did not expect others (and perhaps not even themselves) to behave in ways reflecting such principles. In some important respects, this finding is wholly consistent with the above body of work suggesting that people develop a variety of concerns, including prescriptive and generalizable moral concerns, even in cultural contexts that might ostensibly impede such development. However, these studies also reveal troublingly distinct patterns of moral reasoning with regard to revenge. In particular, when asked whether people might seek revenge against an individual from a group responsible for their family's displacement, not only did they expect that people would rely on stealing or physical harm in an effort to gain retribution, but they also stated that they would not feel guilty about having done so. Perhaps most tellingly, an unusual number of these young people also judged such vengeful actions to be morally acceptable.

To the extent that these findings for children's interpretations and judgments of revenge diverge from those observed in community samples in the United States (e.g.,
Astor, 1994; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Yell, 2003), they suggest that growing up in a context in which one’s experiences stand in stark contrast to one’s own moral principles does have implications for moral–developmental processes, including individuals’ ability or motivation to trust both others and themselves to honor moral commitments and to control their own aggression (Posada & Wainryb, 2008; Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2008). In similar ways, it has been suggested that children’s moral functioning might be compromised when their social experiences are characterized by a deep lack of reciprocity and caring, or when they perceive that their societies are feature systemic inequalities and unfair distributions of power and privilege (Arsenio & Gold, 2006; Wilkinson, Beaty, & Lurry, 2009). Specifically, when growing up in such societal contexts, children are likely to eventually conclude that caring and fairness are not organizing features of their daily interactions, but rather that power and domination are more central concerns for understanding and adapting to one’s social world.

Similarly, our own research looking at youth in various war-torn countries suggests that being chronically exposed to societal violence and injustice (Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2010) and participating in socially sanctioned violence (Wainryb, 2011b) are associated with distinct disruptions in youths’ abilities to make sense of their experiences of moral wrongdoing and to construct a sense of their own (and other people’s) moral agency. For example, in our data we have observed that when furnishing narrative accounts of their own experiences of moral conflict and moral wrongdoing, war-exposed youth often construct a uniquely impoverished sense of their own moral agency and of other people’s moral agency. That is, their accounts tend to be devoid of references to what they and others felt, wanted, and thought, suggesting that these youth struggle to consider their experiences in relation to their own and others’ motives, cognitions, and emotions and to provide psychological explanations for their own or others’ behaviors. It is not clear whether this pattern in narrative accounts results from a passive deadening of moral agency, or from youths’ more active strategies for avoiding the implications of their actions; it may be that both processes are at play (Recchia & Wainryb, 2011; Wainryb, 2010, 2011b). Regardless, the numbing of moral agency suggests that these young people may be less able to acknowledge their own status as agents responsible for their actions—a deficit that has been linked to unregulated, aggressive behavior and poor psychosocial adjustment (Fonagy, 2003). Another prevalent disruption observed in the ways war-exposed youth construct their own moral experiences involves a relative imbalance in the articulation of their own versus other people’s moral agency. In our war-exposed samples, many children’s accounts of their own moral conflicts and transgressions include rich representations of their own moral agency but omit references to the mental states of those who were the victims or targets of their behaviors. In other words, youths often construct a restricted moral universe wherein only they and members of their own group are represented as moral agents whose actions are guided by goals, intentions, beliefs, and emotions. Such imbalanced or polarized construal of moral agency tends to facilitate interpersonal aggression and to carry the risk of perpetuating cycles of harm and injustice (Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2010; see also Hammack, 2011).

While these patterns stand in stark contrast to the narrative accounts of adolescents in less violent environments (Wainryb et al., 2005, 2011), it is worth noting that it is not necessarily the case that experiences in a violent or unjust society are unequivocally linked to
disruptions in moral development; for instance, in the context of clashes between young people and their broader communities, research on youth protest and activism suggests that such experiences may serve to support enduring commitments to the needs of minorities and civic involvement (e.g., Barber, 2009; Flanagan, 2004). In this respect, making sense of systemic violence and injustice in one's society may be linked to both risk and resilience vis-à-vis sociomoral–developmental processes, albeit in complex and varied ways that depend on the particular social and political realities that are faced in specific cultural contexts (Recchia & Wainryb, 2011; Wainryb, 2010).

Collectively, this research suggests that living in a society where violence and injustice have become widespread does account for long-term outcomes in the realm of sociomoral development. In what ways might children’s and adults’ moral sense be affected by living in a society in which they perceive that their autonomy or rights are severely or unfairly restricted or that their access to societal and economic resources is limited? To be sure, we are far from the first to ask about the psychosocial consequences of excessively limited personal autonomy or of social or economic disenfranchisement. Many of these consequences appear to be negative. For instance, across a variety of cultures, when adolescents perceive that their parents exert excessive control in personal or private areas of their lives, this is linked to negative outcomes, including internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and interpersonal sensitivity, as well as lower academic achievement (Hasebe, Nucci, & Nucci, 2004; Qin, Pomerantz, & Wang, 2009; see also Tasopoulos-Chan, Smetana, & Yau, 2009). Similar patterns can be observed among adults who perceive that their society places restrictions on their autonomy (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003). Furthermore, research reveals the negative psychological impacts on children of belonging to a racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or gender group that is the target of systematic discrimination, marginalization, or disenfranchisement within a society (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003; Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). Recent social–epidemiological research highlights the widespread social and psychological effects of relative levels of income inequality among developed nations, including consequences for child well-being, mental illness, trust in others, and levels of violence (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). On the other hand, experiencing adversity and becoming cognizant of injustice may also be linked to some positive developmental outcomes, such as wisdom or personal strength (e.g., Masten & Wright, 2010).

This body of research provides evidence of links between more and less hierarchical relations in regard to individual, economic, or social power, and a variety of psychosocial outcomes. However, psychological research has not yet adequately charted the extent to which moral–developmental processes across cultures are implicated in these findings. Such research could provide an important complement to existing work, in that it could elucidate how divergent moral understandings (e.g., perceptions of the extent to which everyday interactions are organized in terms of reciprocity and caring or in terms of power, domination, and revenge) contribute to the apparently profound consequences of growing up in a society in which the rights and opportunities for certain groups of individuals are systematically constrained, or in which people routinely behave in hurtful ways. We are making a strong pitch for the importance of research looking at the effects that unique cultural arrangements may have on children’s and adults’ sociomoral development and sociomoral lives. Even as we do so, however, we still also emphatically argue that such
research should continue to recognize the multiplicity of individuals’ concerns within societies (including how they understand and struggle with issues related to norms, reciprocity, harm, entitlements, and justice); we contend that such analyses are better placed to provide answers to questions about the distinct developmental patterns in different cultures than is research focusing on dominant cultural values or templates.

Concluding Thoughts: On the Complexity of Moral Lives in Cultures

A particular discourse about culture has enjoyed a sort of conceptual and communicative hegemony in the world of psychological research. This discourse has centered on an understanding of culture stamped with assertions of holism and integration. But this view of culture conceals the varied and complex experiences of individuals within societies and ignores systems of inequality. It overestimates the power of society to dictate meaning and underestimates individual agency, rendering the process of development as one of conservative adaptation to culture. Adopting a more critical understanding of culture implies discarding the language of coherence and harmony, and acknowledging that cultures are made up of individuals who have diverse concerns and goals and are capable of reflecting on values, practices, and traditions, embracing some and rejecting others. It also implies acknowledging that, in any community, persons, especially those in unequal positions, are bound to develop different and often conflicting perspectives. Hence, the study of social and moral development in culture must attend to the many contexts of social life in cultures and to the varied ways in which individuals make sense of their experiences in those social contexts.

This is not to say that the social and moral lives of persons in cultures are devoid of pattern. Rather, within cultures, multiple partial and overlapping patterns assert themselves to varying degrees, in different social contexts, and in different realms of experience. Thus, speaking about the pervasive heterogeneity within cultures does not imply that differences among cultures do not exist or are trivial. To be sure, historical, social, and political circumstances shape and frame extremely different developmental contexts for people in different parts of the world. Moreover, societies differ substantially in regard to the realms of life that are organized around hierarchical relations (e.g., economic, family, religious), the extent to which hierarchical differences are sanctioned and institutionalized, and the opportunities for individuals to gain (or lose) power and status. We have thus urged that, while attending to the complexity within societies and the constructive processes that are universally relevant to understanding moral development, research must remain alert to ways in which specific cultural arrangements inform pathways of moral development.

Urging sensitivity to contextual specificity and cultural conditions, however, is not the same as posing distinct, essential, moral sensibilities, or arguing for moral relativism. To capture the diversity of social and moral life across cultures while both steering clear from dangerous essentializations and giving voice to the multiple and dynamic perspectives that coexist within cultures, research on social and moral development should focus its attention on the “local” ways in which goals and concerns with matters of justice, autonomy, friendship, mutuality, and tradition are played out in harmony or conflict, in distinct contexts, within different cultures. Research must also question presumptions about children’s and adults’ acceptance of cultural norms and practices and, instead, set out to identify the
local forms that cooperation, submission, opposition, and subversion take in different societies. In moving away from the construct of culture as the main anchor of human diversity, research on social and moral development has the potential for documenting the range of diversity in human development—not the different moral outlooks of different cultures, but the multiple and conflicting outlooks of different people within different cultures.

References


Moral Lives Across Cultures


The seminal work in the modern study of children’s moral development is Piaget’s (1932/1997) *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. As is well known, Piaget claimed that before the age of 8 or 9 years children make moral judgments based only on a respect for authority and the social norms emanating from this authority—and so they are not really autonomous moral agents. But, as is also well known, Piaget focused exclusively on the explicit moral judgments that children were capable of formulating in language. Kohlberg’s extension of Piaget’s framework (e.g., Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1969, 1976) also asked children to express their reasoned moral judgments linguistically, and also found that preschool children were essentially premoral (i.e., preconventional).

Turiel and colleagues (Killen, 1991; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987) contested the Piaget–Kohlberg picture of preschoolers as premoral or preconventional. In their theory and research, 3- to 6-year-old children already understand a good deal about morality; specifically, they distinguish moral norms from social conventions, judging that only moral norms are obligatory, universally applicable, and not derived from adult authority. Thus, while a boy might find it silly to wear a dress, he could do so if an adult authorized it or if he belonged to another culture in which it was acceptable, but it would be wrong for him to hit an innocent child, even if an adult authorized it and even in other cultures. Much data support this view of preschool children as at least somewhat competent in their judgments about morality (for reviews, see Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006).

Work from the past few decades has thus established that moral understanding begins early in development, certainly far earlier than Piaget and Kohlberg proposed, and concerns quite subtle and differentiated judgments. But all of this research has been almost exclusively cognitive (or social–cognitive) in nature. In contrast, in this chapter, we approach children’s early moral development from a somewhat different starting point. Following trends in moral philosophy and moral psychology, we consider children’s moral development in its evolutionary context. This means, first of all, that there is a focus not only on moral cognition and judgment but also on moral action. In evolutionary theory, action is always the primary level of analysis because natural selection only “sees” and “acts
upon” actions, with any underlying motivations and cognitive processes selected for only insofar as they have effects on the organism’s (hopefully) adaptive actions. Second of all, this evolutionary perspective has also led researchers to focus on what is most likely the larger social context of human morality, namely, human cooperation in general. After all, the main social function of morality is arguably to regulate social interactions in the general direction of cooperation, given individuals who are at least somewhat selfish.

The outcome of this new research is the discovery that young children’s social behavior has a much stronger moral dimension, at much younger ages, than previously supposed. Although they cannot articulate it explicitly in language, even toddlers understand a good deal about such things as collaboration, helping, sharing, the feelings of others, fairness, and social norms—as demonstrated by their appropriate actions and reactions in various morally relevant situations. This research does not compete with the social cognitive developmental tradition focusing on moral judgment but rather complements it by highlighting an earlier age and other dimensions of the process. In the preface to his classic book, Piaget (1932/1997) writes: “Readers will find in this book no direct analysis of child morality as it is practiced in home and school life or in children’s societies. It is the moral judgment that we propose to investigate, not moral behavior or sentiments” (p. 10). In contrast, we begin here precisely with young children’s early moral behavior and sentiments in their direct interactions with others (what we refer to as “toddlers’ second-personal morality”), and then go on to see how these undergird older preschoolers’ more impersonal (agent-neutral) verbal judgments of morality (what we refer to as “preschoolers’ norm-based morality”).

**Theoretical Foundations: The Puzzle of Human Cooperation**

In modern evolutionary theory, cooperation must always be grounded in the individual fitness of the cooperators; an individual sacrificing him- or herself out of existence for the sake of others is a nonstarter. The emergence of cooperation in a species thus requires specific mechanisms that balance the organism’s self-interest with its concern and respect for others.

Humans’ closest living relatives, the great apes, are mainly competitive creatures, with access to valuable resources such as food and mates determined mainly by dominance, fighting ability, and a modicum of Machiavellian intelligence (Byrne & Whiten, 1988). But great apes do cooperate in some ways. For example, chimpanzees band together for group defense, they form small coalitions for purposes of intragroup conflict, and they even—unique among the apes—hunt small monkeys in groups (Muller & Mitani, 2005). In experimental situations, chimpanzees have even shown a propensity to help others attain their goals by doing such things as fetching objects for them, opening doors for them, and so forth (see Warneken & Tomasello, 2009, for a review). And there is some evidence for “attitudinal reciprocity” in great apes: individuals doing helpful things for those with whom they have had positive interactions (and so have felt good) in the past (e.g., de Waal, 1997).

But humans cooperate on a whole other level. They engage in an extremely wide array of collaborative activities—from foraging to football—many under the aegis of social norms and formal institutions that set specific rules for cooperation. Humans also engage in a wide array of altruistic activities, involving everything from doing favors for friends.
to donating blood for strangers to fighting and dying for one’s country (Richerson & Boyd, 2005). Tomasello, Melis, Tennie, Wyman, and Herrmann (2012) argue and present evidence that humans became “ultra-cooperative” in all of these ways in two main evolutionary steps. They call their hypothesis the interdependence hypothesis.

In a first step a few hundred thousand years ago (*Homo heidelbergensis*), something in the ecology changed, which forced humans to become collaborative foragers: Individuals had to be good collaborators or else starve. This meant that individuals became interdependent with one another, such that each individual had a direct interest in the well-being of others as partners. Thus, during a mutualistic collaboration, if my partner is having trouble, it is in my interest to help her, since performance of her role is vital to our joint success. Moreover, if I have some sense of the future, if one of my regular partners is having trouble at any time, I will help her so that I will have a good partner for tomorrow. Interdependence thus breeds helping. And the fact of partner choice helps to keep everyone cooperating and helps control cheating, as all individuals (who have the requisite cognitive abilities) know that others are judging them for their cooperativeness and that their survival depends on others choosing them as a partner (Boehm, 2001). The result is that if I monopolize all the food at the end of the foraging instead of sharing it equitably, or if I slack off on my work during the foraging, others will simply exclude me the next time. Our hypothesis is that this social selection of partners in interdependent contexts thus advantages good cooperators who have sympathy for others, and so help them, and who feel an equality with others, and so share the spoils of their joint endeavors with them in mutually satisfactory ways.

In a second step a couple of hundred thousand years ago (*Homo sapiens sapiens*), as modern humans faced competition from other groups (Richerson & Boyd, 2005), they scaled up these new collaborative skills and motivations to group life in general. With a constant threat from other groups, life within the group became one big collaborative activity, in which each individual had to play her role. Humans thus became group-minded, and valued those who shared their cultural practices and values (Boehm, 2001). As part of this group-mindedness, they created such things as cultural conventions, norms, and institutions, and they began deliberately to confine their altruism and collaboration to in-group members only. Social selection was now about following the social norms of the group, and good cooperators at this stage were individuals who both followed social norms and enforced them on others (including themselves in acts of guilt and shame) (Fessler, 2004; Richerson & Boyd, 2005). The second evolutionary step thus saw the normativization of humans’ social interactions. Those social interactions that were underlain by attitudes of sympathetic concern for others and a sense of equality (which had already developed in the first step) arose as moral norms, whereas conventional norms involved domains of social interaction that did not involve these underlying attitudes (cf. Nichols, 2004).

We believe that thinking in terms of these two evolutionary steps of the interdependence hypothesis can help us to clarify some things about the early ontogeny of human cooperation and morality. In what follows, therefore, we look at some recent studies of children’s moral development in terms of two dimensions (which are most prominent at two different ages): (a) prosocial behavior in children from, mainly, 1 to 3 years of age; and (b) following and enforcing social norms in children from, mainly, 3 to 5 years of age. This is not an ontogenetic sequence: One-year-old children may be in some sense concerned
with social norms, and 5-year-old children are certainly concerned with prosociality. However, it is not clear whether children younger than 3 years of age understand norms to be social “agreements” as they are following them. We thus posit in toddlers a kind of “natural,” second-personal morality of cooperation and prosocial behavior (Darwall, 2006). This means that young children’s moral sentiments and actions are based mainly on their direct interpersonal actions with other specific individuals, not on group-wide social norms. One may also conceive of this as a kind of dyadic morality, that is, even if I am interacting with more than one individual, it is my dyadic relation with each of the other individuals that is relevant and there is no sense of a group. This second-personal morality is then followed by a more norm-based, agent-neutral morality in middle to late preschool years.

Research Evidence

Toddlers’ Second-Personal Morality

Human infants are already highly social beings, and they begin forming social relationships with others during the first year of life. They also presumably have some sense of their dependence on, if not interdependence with, other people. Although young children are of course selfish in many situations, in many other situations, as we will show below, they subordinate their own self-interests in order to do such things as collaborate, sympathize with, help, and share resources with others. They also evaluate others in terms of such cooperative behaviors and begin to help and share with others more selectively as a result.

Collaboration and Commitment

Young children are surprisingly skilled collaborative and cooperative partners. Already early in the second year of life, toddlers can take turns to achieve social coordination with others (e.g., Eckerman, Davis, & Didow, 1989; Eckerman & Didow, 1989). More relevant for our purposes, young children are motivated to participate jointly in joint activities: When a cooperative activity breaks down (such as when the partner suddenly stops participating), 18-month olds and 2-year olds actively try to reengage the partner in order to continue the joint activity rather than attempting to continue the activity by themselves (Warneken, Chen, & Tomasello, 2006). Strikingly, this is true even when the partner is not needed for the child to complete the activity, showing that children do not view the partner as a “social tool” to achieve their own goal but rather in a truly collaborative light (Warneken, Gräfenhain, & Tomasello, 2012). Even 14-month-old infants show some basic capacity to perform simple coordinated activities, such as bouncing a block on a trampoline, with an adult, and make some effort to reengage passive partners (Warneken & Tomasello, 2007).

Humans’ closest primate relatives, the great apes, on the other hand, do not show this motivation for jointness. For instance, although chimpanzees do coordinate their actions with a partner to achieve individual goals, they do not seem interested in achieving joint, social goals, and they make no effort to reengage passive partners in order to continue a joint activity (Warneken et al., 2006). Indeed, when given a free choice of how to obtain
food, chimpanzees choose a solo option over a collaborative one, while 3-year-old children more often choose the collaborative option (Rekers, Haun, & Tomasello, 2011). These findings together point to a fundamental human drive to collaborate with others to achieve joint and shared goals.

Furthermore, once humans have formed a joint goal, they feel committed to it: They know that opting out will harm or disappoint the others, and they act in ways that prevent this. Recent work has revealed that even toddlers show an understanding of such commitments. For instance, when working jointly with a partner on a task that should result in both actors receiving a reward, 3.5-year olds continue to work until the partner has received his reward even if they have already received their own reward earlier in the process (Hamann, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2012). Moreover, when 3-year olds need to break away from a joint commitment with a partner, such as the commitment to play a game together (rather than individually), they do not simply walk away but “take leave” from the other as a way of acknowledging and asking to be excused for breaking the commitment (Gräfenhain, Behne, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2009).

Thus, even very young children are social, collaborative, and cooperative beings who view their collaborative and cooperative efforts as inherently joint. Such jointness makes children interdependent; they need the other to achieve their (social) goals, and they know that the other needs them. They thus experience collaboration and cooperation as committed activities. Certainly by 3 years of age, children feel responsible for their joint commitments and either make an effort to honor them or “apologize” for breaking them. From early on, then, children show strong signs of interdependence.

**Sympathy and Helping**

Young children and even infants demonstrate remarkable prosocial propensities. By 14 to 18 months of age, they readily engage in various forms of instrumental helping such as picking up an object that an adult has accidentally dropped or opening a cabinet door when an adult cannot do so because his hands are full. They do not do these things in control situations that are similar but in which the adult does not need help; for instance, they do not pick up an object the adult has thrown down intentionally or open a door he approaches with no intention of opening it (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006, 2007). Toddlers even help others at some cost to themselves (Svetlova, Nichols, & Brownell, 2010). Importantly, infants’ helping is not limited to completing others’ action goals. Thus, when 12-month-old infants see an adult searching for an object that they know the location of, they point to direct the adult’s attention to it (Liszkowski, Carpenter, Striano, & Tomasello, 2006; Liszkowski, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2008). Given that infants themselves do not gain anything by providing this information, whereas the adult who was searching for the object does, infants’ informative pointing may be considered a prosocial act.

A widespread belief is that young children become prosocial as a result of encouragement and rewards from adults. However, in a recent study, when 20-month-old children were rewarded for their helpful behavior, their helpfulness actually decreased over time once the reward was taken away; children who were not rewarded at all maintained a high level of helpfulness throughout (Warneken & Tomasello, 2008). Following the logic of “overjustification,” this finding suggests that young children’s motivation to help is
intrinsic and not dependent on concrete extrinsic rewards, and indeed it is undermined by such rewards (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). Reinforcing this finding, Hepach, Vaish, and Tomasello (2012) found, using a physiological measure of children's arousal, that 2-year olds are not motivated primarily by a need to help a person themselves, but rather by a need just to see the person helped.

During this same early period, young children also begin to provide comfort and assistance to those in emotional distress, such as a person who is in pain after bumping her knee or is upset about her broken teddy bear (e.g., Bischof-Köhler, 1991; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). The concern children show for a distressed individual correlates with and is thought to motivate their prosocial acts toward that individual (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Strikingly, young children's concern is not an automatic response to distress cues but rather a flexible and sophisticated response. This has recently been shown in two ways. First, 18- and 25-month-old children show concern and subsequent prosocial behavior toward a victim of harm even if the victim expresses no overt distress cues while being harmed (Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2009). Second, 3-year-old children show reduced concern and prosocial behavior towards a “crybaby” (i.e., a person who is considerably distressed after being very mildly inconvenienced), than toward a person who is similarly distressed after being more seriously harmed (Hepach, Vaish, & Tomasello, 2013 see also Leslie, Mallon, & Dicorcia, 2006). Thus, children’s sympathetic responses take into account not only the presence or absence of distress cues from a person but also the contextual cues surrounding the distress. From early in ontogeny, then, sympathy is a multidetermined and thus reliable response (see Hoffman, 2000; Vaish & Warneken, 2012).

Around the same time that young children demonstrate these remarkable prosocial behaviors themselves, they also show a preference for prosocial over antisocial others. Indeed, even early in the very first year, infants distinguish prosocial from antisocial characters and prefer to touch the prosocial characters (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011; Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007; Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & Bloom, 2003). These preferences are soon apparent in children’s prosocial behaviors. By age 2, for instance, toddlers help those who were helpful to them in previous interactions more than those who were not helpful, demonstrating direct reciprocity (Dunfield & Kuhlmeier, 2010). Just a year later, children also demonstrate indirect reciprocity: For instance, 3- to 4-year-old children reduce their prosocial behavior toward an individual who caused or intended to cause harm to another individual (Kenward & Dahl, 2011; Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2010). Through such selective helping, young children demonstrate their recognition of and preference to interact and cooperate with those who are prosocial and their avoidance of those who are harmful or noncooperative, both toward them and toward others.

Moreover, and in line with our evolutionary analysis, there is evidence that children help an individual more in a collaborative context than a noncollaborative context. In a recent study, Hamann, Warneken, Greenberg, & Tomasello, (2011) showed that 3.5-year olds are more likely to help a peer attain a reward when they previously attained a reward by participating in a collaborative task with the peer than when they previously attained a reward without participating in a collaborative task. On the other hand, although chimpanzees do show some prosocial behaviors toward humans and conspecifics (e.g., Melis et al., 2011; Warneken & Tomasello, 2006), this behavior is not affected by whether the
context is a collaborative or a noncollaborative one (Greenberg, Hamann, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2010). This hints at the possibility that human prosocial behavior evolved in interdependent, collaborative contexts.

Together, these findings on infants’ and toddlers’ instrumental helping, informative pointing, comforting, and selective helping of harmed and/or cooperative others, demonstrate a rich system of early prosocial behavior. From early on, children are tuned to others’ needs and emotional states and are motivated to act prosocially toward them. We would argue that these prosocial behaviors are just as much a part of the moral domain as children’s judgments and justifications about hypothetical moral scenarios, and indeed children’s later moral judgments rest on the norm that everyone should care about the welfare of others. Indeed, the research shows that children’s early prosociality is as truly “moral” as their later judgments and justifications, as it is intrinsically motivated, based in concern for others, grounded in an interpretation of the situation, flexible depending on interactions and evaluations of others, and facilitated by collaboration.

Equality and Sharing

Young children’s prosocial proclivities are apparent not only in their helping and sympathizing but also in their sharing behaviors. Naturalistic observations suggest that as early as 8 months of age, infants may show or give toys to parents, other infants, siblings, and strangers, even when resources are low (e.g., Hay, 1979; Rheingold, Hay, & West, 1976). With development, sharing becomes increasingly selective: Even 12-month-old infants make some distinctions between recipients of their prosocial actions, being more likely to share objects with their peers and with their own mothers than with the peers’ mothers (Young & Lewis, 1979).

Some experimental work on early sharing suggests, however, that toddlers are not so willing to share. For instance, spontaneous sharing of food was not found among 18- or 25-month-old children in an experimental setting (Brownell, Svetlova, & Nichols, 2009). Furthermore, 3- to 4-year olds are generally found to be selfish in their distributions, whereas around 5 to 6 years of age, children show a greater sense of equality and fairness (Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008; Lane & Coon, 1972; Rochat et al., 2009). However, these experimental studies involved windfall situations in which a child is given some resources by a third party without having to work for it and must relinquish some resources to demonstrate fairness. Such situations are removed from the evolutionary mechanisms that we believe likely shape these phenomena in early ontogeny. Our hypothesis is that from early in development, children’s sharing and fairness-related behaviors should reflect the effects of the collaborative foraging context of early humans, in which one shares the spoils equally amongst those who took part in the collaborative effort. We thus argue that prior work has underestimated children’s sensitivity to equality because it has not provided the most fundamental context in which such sensitivity should appear.

Accordingly, recent work shows that 3-year-old children who have obtained rewards by working collaboratively with each other divide up their spoils equitably rather than monopolizing them, even when the resources could easily be monopolized (Warneken, Lohse, Melis, & Tomasello, 2011). This is in stark contrast to chimpanzees, whose strong tendency to compete over the spoils of collaborative efforts severely limits their collaboration.
Most strikingly, 3-year-old children are also more likely to divide up their rewards equally if they obtained the rewards by working collaboratively than by working individually or receiving a windfall (Hamann et al., 2011).

Young children not only distribute resources equally themselves but also distinguish equal from unequal distributions and prefer equal distributors and distributions. For instance, in a violation of expectations paradigm, Schmidt and Sommerville (2011) showed that 15-month-old infants looked longer to a scene in which resources (such as crackers) were distributed unequally among recipients than to a scene in which they were distributed equally, suggesting that even at this early age, infants expect resources to be distributed equally amongst recipients. Geraci and Surian (2011) further showed that when 16-month olds see one distributor being fair toward a recipient (in the sense of distributing resources equally between the recipient and a second individual) and another distributor being unfair toward the same recipient, they expect the recipient to approach the equal distributor, and in a manual choice task, they themselves show a preference for the equal distributor. Finally, among somewhat older children (3.5-year olds), these preferences play out in their own distribution behavior: They distribute more resources to individuals who have previously shared with others than to individuals who have not shared (Olson & Spelke, 2008), although to our knowledge, whether children would give more resources to equal than to unequal distributors remains an unexplored question.

Over the course of development, children’s resource distribution moves beyond only equality and becomes more sensitive to reciprocity norms, relationships, and the behaviors of others. Some of this sensitivity is apparent as early as 3 years of age, when children’s sharing of toys with a peer increases if that peer had previously shared toys with them, suggesting a sensitivity to direct reciprocity by this age (Levitt, Weber, Clark, & McDonnell, 1985). Moreover, 3-year olds display negative emotional responses to distributions in which they receive less, and indeed, even do so occasionally to distributions in which they receive more than another child (LoBue, Nishida, Chiong, DeLoache, & Haidt, 2011). By about 4 years of age, children share (even at a cost to themselves) with their friends more than with nonfriends or strangers (Birch & Billman, 1986; Moore, 2009), and by 8 years of age, children share more with their in-group than their out-group members (Fehr et al., 2008).

A full-blown concept of fairness (i.e., an understanding of distributive justice or the proper way to divide up resources among people taking into account multiple factors; Nisan, 1984) begins to emerge only in the school years. In the traditional work on the development of fairness, children are presented with hypothetical fair or unfair scenarios and are interviewed about their responses to the scenarios. This work has revealed a developmental trend such that young children progress from considering largely irrelevant characteristics of recipients such as desire, age, or height, to a preference for equal division of resources at about 5 or 6 years of age, to a preference for reward in proportion to the input (i.e., equity) among children older than 6 years of age (e.g., Damon, 1975; Fraser, Kemp, & Keenan, 2007; Hook & Cook, 1979). Eventually, children move beyond the equity rule to integrate both need and merit information (McGillicuddy-De Lisi, Watkins, & Vinchur, 1994; see Damon, 1977). By 8 years of age, children can vary their allocation decisions appropriately depending on context. For instance, they rely on the principle
of equity in a reward-for-work context, of equality in a voting context, and of need in a charity context (Sigelman & Waitzman, 1991; see also Enright et al., 1984).

Interestingly, however, a recent study showed that the context of collaboration facilitates even young children’s understanding of equity (Ng, Heyman, & Barner, 2011). In this study, children were presented with scenarios in which one giver gave an equal proportion of his resources to himself and a receiver, whereas another giver gave himself a greater proportion than the receiver. The scenarios differed in whether the givers had obtained the resources by working collaboratively with the receiver or by working individually. Even 3-year olds judged the fair giver—the one who gave an equal proportion—to be nicer than the unfair giver, but only in the collaborative context; children did not distinguish the proportional distributions in the individual context. Thus, in a collaborative context, which we argue is a highly relevant context for resource distribution, even preschoolers demonstrate sophisticated intuitions about proportional distribution, which is so central to the full-fledged concept of fairness.

In sum, recent work has provided evidence for a surprisingly early ontogenetic emergence of sharing and the foundations of fairness, at least in the sense of equality. Toddlers, and to some degree even infants, show a sense of equality in resource distributions, in particular when examined in collaboration situations. Moreover, when faced with the choice of interacting with or distributing resources to others, even very young children show a preference for individuals who distribute to others equally. They also show sensitivity to a critical aspect of fairness—equity—when examined in collaborative situations. Thus, sharing and some foundational aspects of fairness appear early in moral development, especially in early collaborative and cooperative contexts. They are an important aspect of toddlers’ second-personal morality and are, we argue, the seeds of the full-fledged norm-based sense of fairness that emerges later in development.

Summary

Evidence is growing rapidly for a remarkably rich and multifaceted morality, in the sense of prosociality, very early in development. Toddlers and even infants readily engage in collaborative activities with others and recognize the jointness or interdependence therein. They also help others in a variety of ways, even when it does not benefit them to do so, and they show a sense of equality in dividing up resources in some situations. Importantly, toddlers help others more and are more likely to share equally with them when they are collaborating with them, providing support for our hypothesis that it was within the context of collaboration or interdependence that prosocial behavior likely emerged. Toddlers also evaluate others in terms of their prosocial and cooperative behaviors and withdraw their helping and sharing from noncooperative individuals.

Still, all of these behaviors and evaluations are, we argue, based less in a normative, agent-neutral understanding of morality that applies to everyone equally than in a second-personal morality based on personal relationships and social emotions (Darwall, 2006). Thus, toddlers view others primarily from a second-personal, or dyadic, standpoint and evaluate them according to whether they do or do not like the others’ behaviors. This is an early form of morality, but it is not a fully adult-like morality—the critical second stage of norm-based, agent-neutral morality is still to come.
Theoretical Background: Preschoolers’ Norm-Based Morality

Toddlers certainly respond when adults enforce norms—for example, when adults tell them things like, “We don’t hit other children.” They thus seem to follow all kinds of social norms. It is not clear, however, whether they are responding to the norm per se. They could equally be responding simply to the adult’s individual imperative utterance that they do or do not do something at that moment. But responding to the norm itself means responding to something more general and timeless than that.

In adult society, social norms are mutual expectations, indeed mutual agreements or commitments, about the way that individuals ought to behave in certain situations. Norms go beyond the particular—they are general and agent-neutral—in at least three ways. First, social norms articulate an objective standard of behavior that is mutually known by all in the group: In situations like this, one ought to behave like that—and we all, including you, know this. Second, the force of the norm is not individual opinion but rather group opinion (or perhaps some other larger entity such as the group’s gods), based ultimately in an agreement or commitment into which each individual enters. It is not just that I don’t like you doing that, but rather that it is wrong, and we (including you) have agreed that we don’t behave like that. Third, the norm applies to everyone in the group (or perhaps subgroup) equally—including the self. “One” does not behave like that in this group, and that applies to me as well. Social norms are thus mutually known group expectations and commitments, with respect to group-known standards, which all group members are expected to respect.

Until there is more research, we may remain agnostic about precisely how toddlers understand social norms as adults enforce them, and in particular whether they understand their generality and agent-neutrality. However, starting at around 3 years of age, children begin enforcing social norms on others, and the way they do this provides strong evidence that they have begun to understand social norms as something that goes beyond individuals and, importantly, beyond themselves.

Enforcement of Social Norms

Toddlers socially evaluate other persons, as documented above, in selectively helping and sharing with them depending on, essentially, whether they view them as nice or mean. In addition, toddlers are building up knowledge of what the norm is, statistically speaking, in many situations. They thus learn and apply words such as broken, dirty, and bad to situations that violate standards and are thus not “normal” (Kagan, 1981). But beyond avoiding mean people and noticing statistical irregularities, children around 3 years of age also begin to actively intervene in situations—either physically or in acts of verbal protest—to try to set right deviations and violations of the norm. Crucially, they do this from a third-party stance, when they themselves are not directly involved or affected by the norm violation, and they often do this with normative language, using generic terms that explicitly mark the generality and agent-neutrality of the judgment.

For example, in a recent study (Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011), children and two puppets each created a drawing or a sculpture, after which one puppet (the recipient) left the room. When the remaining puppet (the actor) then began to destroy the recipient’s
creation, 3-year olds protested verbally against the actor’s actions. Impressively, approximately one quarter of the children protested using normative language such as “You can’t do that” (in fact, these German children often used the generic pronoun man, as in “One doesn’t do that”) versus, for instance, imperatives or desire-dependent language such as “I don’t want you to do that” (Searle, 2001). Pilot work with 2-year olds showed almost no protest in such situations. Rossano, Rakoczy, and Tomasello (2011) found something very similar: Three-year olds protested, again sometimes normatively, when one puppet threatened to take home or throw away another puppet’s possession, whereas 2-year olds only protested in an agent-specific manner (when the actor acted on the children’s property and thus directly caused harm to them) but not in an agent-neutral manner. In both of these studies, 3-year olds went beyond objecting to harm done to them—they objected when harm was done to someone else. They applied the moral norm against destroying or stealing property in an agent-neutral way: on behalf of someone else, as a disinterested enforcer, with the judgment marked as applying generally to all in the group.

Beyond protesting verbally, children demonstrate several other enforcement-like behaviors during third-party moral transgressions. For instance, 3-year olds who witness an actor destroying an absent recipient’s artwork later tattle to the recipient about the actor’s actions, perhaps as a way to get the transgressor punished (Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011). Children of this age also carry out restorative justice by returning to a victim what a thief had stolen away (Riedl, Jensen, Call, & Tomasello, 2011). They thus intervene and respond to third-party moral transgressions in multiple ways that provide converging evidence for their emerging agent-neutral morality.

Interestingly, and perhaps even more tellingly, 3-year-old children also intervene and protest when someone violates a conventional norm, in which there is no harm involved. Thus, Rakoczy, Warneken, and Tomasello (2008) had children watch as a puppet announced that he would now “dax,” but he then performed a different action than the one the child had previously seen an adult doing and calling “daxing.” Most children objected in some way, even though the game was a solitary activity so that playing it incorrectly did not harm, or even inconvenience, anyone. Again, as with moral norms, children often used normative, generic language such as “No, it does not go like that!” Two-year olds protested to some extent in this study, but almost always imperatively rather than normatively. Importantly, children were not just objecting to the fact that the puppet did not perform the action he said he would, as a subsequent study obtained the same results with a nonverbal indication of the game context: A particular action was acceptable when carried out in a particular location that marked the appropriate context for the action, but not when it was carried out in a different location that marked a different, inappropriate context for the action (Wyman, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2009).

Three-year olds’ emerging understanding of social norms as agreements among people is especially clear in studies involving joint pretense. In studies by Rakoczy (2008) and Wyman et al. (2009), 3-year-old children again objected—in much the same way as in the other studies of moral norms and game rules—when a puppet used a wooden block as a pretend sandwich if the child and an adult had previously designated this block as pretend soap (“No, one can’t eat that. It’s soap!”). When the same block was later designated as a sandwich in a different game, then children objected if it was used as soap. This flexible behavior clearly demonstrates that young children can, at least in pretense contexts,
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understand that the norms constituting the game are, in a sense, “agreements” that can be changed. This is despite the fact that when asked verbally about such norms and rules governing games, they cannot really answer coherently at this age (Piaget, 1932/1997).

Finally, even further evidence for young children’s understanding of the basic workings of social norms is provided by their selective enforcement of different types of social norms depending on group membership. Thus, children not only distinguish moral from conventional norms on multiple levels, as had been shown in much prior work (see, e.g., Turiel, 2006), but they also enforce the two distinctly. In particular, when 3-year-old children see a moral norm being broken by an in-group member and an out-group member (as determined by their accents), they protest equivalently. But when they see a conventional norm being broken by these same agents, they protest more against an in-group member than an out-group member (Schmidt, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2011). In this way as well, then, 3-year olds have a sense of the conventional nature of conventional norms, that is, that these norms have been decided on by, and thus apply only to, one’s own group but that members of other groups may not be aware of or need not follow the same conventions. The same is not true of moral norms involving harm, toward which they take a more universalist approach.

Together, these recent findings suggest that, at least by 3 years of age, children do not view social norms solely in terms of authority, as Piaget assumed. Rather, they recognize them as general, agent-neutral, mutual expectations that represent some kind of implicit agreement of how “we” ought to behave—with the “we” conceptualized differently in the case of moral versus conventional norms. Because children’s emerging understanding of social norms involves such things as agent-neutrality, generic language, and reference to the group, it may be seen as reflecting their emerging skills and motivations for collective intentionality (Tomasello et al., 2012).

Reputation, Guilt, and Shame

In their everyday worlds, young children are less often judging and enforcing norms on others, and more often being judged and having norms enforced on them. Once more, it is not totally clear the degree to which toddlers do or do not understand this fact, but children certainly seem to know that their behavior is being normatively assessed, and they sometimes alter their behavior accordingly (self-presentational behavior). Moreover, when they transgress, they may even judge and punish themselves via internalized social norms in acts of guilt and shame.

Research using verbal tasks has suggested that it is only around 8 years of age that children start to engage in self-presentational behavior (e.g., Banerjee, 2002). However, two recent studies have found evidence of such behaviors even in preschoolers. In one study (Piazza, Bering, & Ingram, 2011), 5- to 6-year olds were faced with a challenging rule-based task while they were either “watched by an invisible person,” watched by an adult, or were unobserved. Children cheated significantly less on the task when they were observed, either by the invisible person or by the adult, than when they were unobserved. Engelmann, Herrmann, and Tomasello (2011) found something similar, but with peer observers and also in a prosocial condition. Specifically, they found that children stole less from an imaginary child recipient, and helped her more, if a peer was observing them.
Relatedly, in a different experimental paradigm, Haun and Tomasello (2011) found that 4-year olds conformed to their peers’ perceptual judgments (even when they knew better themselves) if they had to express their judgment publicly, in front of the peers, but not if they expressed it alone. Thus, not only do young children judge and form reputations about others’ behavior, but they also know that they are being judged and actively try to manage those judgments.

Children in these studies anticipate being judged and then behave so as to increase positive and decrease negative evaluations of themselves. They manage to avoid having norms applied to them by, in effect, preemptively applying the norms to themselves. But when children do transgress, even if no one sees them and so no one applies the norm, they still quite often apply the norm to themselves in acts of guilt and/or shame. Thus, if they break a toy that belongs to someone else, many preschoolers show signs of feeling guilty or ashamed (e.g., Barrett, Zahn-Waxler, & Cole, 1993; Kochanska, Gross, Lin, & Nichols, 2002; Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, 1990). The feelings of guilt and shame may be seen as a kind of self-punishment that function to prevent individuals from doing the same thing again, lessening the chances of actual punishment from others in the future. Under special conditions, individuals may also reward themselves by feeling pride at having lived up to a social norm when they could have gotten away with ignoring it—e.g., they helped others at great cost to themselves—and this self-praise presumably leads to more norm following in the future (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007).

Guilt, shame, and pride are thus internalized versions of the kind of moral judgments that humans mete out to others who violate or follow social norms. These norm-related, self-conscious emotions thus demonstrate with special clarity that the judgment being made is not my personal feeling about things, but rather it is the group’s. I am sanctioning myself or praising myself on behalf of the group, as it were. I pushed the child off the swing because I wanted to play on the swing, and I still like playing on it, but I also feel guilty about harming the other child. As a particularly strong demonstration of group-mindedness, school-age children even show collective guilt, shame, and pride, that is, they feel guilt, shame, or pride if a member of the group with which they identify does something blameworthy or praiseworthy, as if they themselves had transgressed (Bennett & Sani, 2008).

Interestingly and importantly, another function of social emotions such as guilt and shame comes from their display for others. For instance, displaying guilt to others serves important appeasement functions, showing others that I am already suffering, which I hope evokes concern and forgiveness from the victim and from bystanders, thus reducing the likelihood of punishment (Keltner & Anderson, 2000). Guilt displays also indicate that the transgressor did not mean to cause harm and, more generally, that he is not the kind of person that means harm. They signal that he intends to make amends and to behave more appropriately in the future, and that he is aware of and committed to the norms of the group (Castelfranchi & Poggi, 1990). A remorseful transgressor should thus be seen as self-policing, dependable, and cooperative, eliciting forgiveness, affiliation, and cooperation from the victim and other group members (Darby & Schlenker, 1982, 1989; Goffman, 1967).

Indeed, there is evidence that 6-year-old children blame apologetic actors less, punish them less, forgive them more, and like them better than unapologetic actors (Darby &
Schlenker, 1982, 1989). Children around 4–5 years of age also regard situations in which an actor apologizes as better and more just than ones in which the actor is unapologetic (Irwin & Moore, 1971; Wellman, Larkey, & Somerville, 1979). Even in the absence of explicit apologies, 5-year olds show a preference for transgressors who display guilt, and they prefer to distribute more resources to guilt-displaying transgressors than to unremorseful ones (Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2011). Thus, preschoolers are tuned in to the social functions that displaying an emotion like guilt serves.

Interestingly, not only do preschoolers prefer those who follow norms, but they also prefer those who enforce them. In a recent study (Vaish, Herrmann, Markmann, & Tomasello, in preparation), 4.5- to 6-year-old children watched videos of an observer responding to a transgression she witnessed by either enforcing the norm that the transgressor had broken (e.g., she said in a mildly angry tone, “Hey, you’ve broken [the victim’s] doll! You aren’t allowed to do that. It’s not good”) or by not enforcing the violated norm (e.g., she said in a neutral tone, “Oh, you’ve broken [the victim’s] doll. Oh well, it doesn’t matter”). Children judged that the enforcer had done the right thing, they evaluated the nonenforcer as less good, and they preferred the enforcer. This was despite the fact that the enforcer was actually more negative and unpleasant in her behavior (since she showed some anger) than was the nonenforcer.

We may thus see continuity from toddlers’ social evaluations of others as either helpful or harmful individuals to their enforcement of social norms. From very early ages, they are judging others, and even being selective about the target of their own cooperative behaviors based on those judgments (see the previous section). But it is only during later preschool years that children understand this process of judgment such that they know they are being judged and so can do things to manage those judgments (impression management or self-presentational behaviors). One hypothesis is that this is made possible by some kind of second-order mental reasoning of the form “I am thinking about what you are thinking about me” (Banerjee, 2002). Perhaps such second-order reasoning is also involved as they judge the judgers and judge positively those who find moral transgressions to be bad.

**Summary**

During the later preschool years, then, children become truly moral agents—though of course there are still many further developments to come. The key is that they no longer consider and act toward individuals based only on their own individual judgments of them (although they certainly continue to do that), but in addition they have begun to understand and even internalize the agent-neutral social norms of the group and to consider individuals as group members who both apply social norms to others and have social norms applied to them. And, crucially, they come to consider themselves as just one individual among others—nothing special in the eyes of social norms—and even, in an astounding testament to their bifurcated sense of self, to apply the norms and accompanying punishment equally to themselves.

Children 4 and 5 years old thus operate with an agent-neutral, norm-based morality in which all individuals, including themselves, are equal players. Moreover, they come to self-regulate their own behavior in accordance with these norms, so much so that older preschoolers typically enter new situations not just following norms, but actively seeking
out what those norms are: “What am I supposed to do here? How do I do it” (Kalish, 1998)? Their sense of self is bound up with behaving in accordance with norms.

**Implications for a Developmental Model**

Our attempt here has been to paint a picture of children’s early moral development from a slightly different perspective and with more dimensions than prior work. Using a theoretical framework originally developed for the evolution of human cooperation (Tomassello et al., 2012), we have tried to bring together a number of different research strands to posit two major phases in children’s early moral development.

First, toddlers 1 to 3 years of age (a) have a number of marked prosocial tendencies involving helping and sharing, (b) evaluate others for their prosocial as well as their antisocial tendencies, and (c) modify their prosocial behavior toward others as a function of their judgments about them. We have proposed that toddlers do all of this in what some philosophers have called second-personal mode (Darwall, 2006), that is, with respect to specific interactions they have had with specific individuals (rather than in terms of agent-neutral rules or norms). By the time they are 3 years of age, toddlers already have the basics of the morality of both the “good”—they have sympathy for other individuals and help them as needed—and the “right”—they have a sense of equality in the division of spoils. Perhaps importantly, and consistent with the evolutionary account, toddlers’ attitudes of sympathy and equality toward others—as manifest in their helping and sharing behaviors—are more pronounced toward partners within collaborative activities than outside of such activities.

Toddlers comply with adults’ enforcement of social norms, but they may comprehend them only as simple imperatives from individual to individual. Starting at around 3 years of age, however, preschoolers begin to enforce social norms on others, both moral norms involving potential harm and conventional norms not involving harm. Indeed, and in line with social domain theory (see Smetana, 2006, and Turiel, 2006, for reviews), we may conceptualize toddlers’ development of the attitudes of sympathy and equality toward others as foundational for their subsequent distinguishing of conventional and moral norms, with moral norms being precisely those concerned with situations evoking children’s natural tendencies toward sympathy and equality (and corresponding natural aversions to harm and inequality). If we think of social norms as being mainly about conformity to the group’s ways (“We do things like this”), then conventional norms are all and only about conformity, whereas moral norms are about both conformity and “natural” attitudes of sympathy and equality (“We don’t do things like this because it harms others”). Thus, conventional norms may vary widely across groups, as conformity is important in different behavioral domains in different ways in different groups, but moral norms, insofar as they rest on natural attitudes of sympathy and equality developed by toddlers across all cultures, will show less cultural variation in their scope, although they may of course also differ in their specifics (cf. Nichols, 2004).

The truly unique aspect of this second, norm-based phase in children’s early moral development is its agent-neutrality. Unlike the prosociality of toddlers, based in their experience and relationships with other individuals, when young children begin truly understanding the nature of social norms, they begin applying them to others not just when they themselves are affected, but from a third-party stance. Why children should feel the need to enforce norms on others—especially conventional norms whose violation seemingly does not
cause harm—is not entirely clear, but our view is that it must have something to do with their identification with the group and its ways. We simply do not do things like this, and if you are one of us, you will not either. And when the child herself violates the norm, she will in many cases apply the sanctions to herself in acts of guilt or shame, thus demonstrating with special clarity that social norms apply to everyone equally. Preschoolers thus come to regulate their own behavior by anticipating how their behavior will be viewed by others and their social norms, a form of what Korsgaard (2006) calls normative self-governance.

We may thus conceive of a first phase of children’s natural morality, as it were, based in their prosocial behaviors of helping, comforting, and sharing, and their corresponding attitudes of sympathy and equality—along with judgments of others with respect to these same attitudes. Coming to understand social norms, and the need for both self and others to conform to them, then transforms toddlers’ early prosociality into a genuine morality in which all individuals, including the self, are evaluated with the same set of culturally relevant moral and conventional standards. In human evolution, individuals with this kind of “norm psychology” were necessary for the kind of group-minded cooperation characteristic of large-scale societies in which all the members of a group, even in-group strangers, behave morally and conventionally toward one another. Richerson and Boyd (2005) have even posited that at some point in human evolution, there comes a kind of cultural group selection in which those human groups with the best-functioning social norms and institutions outcompete other groups.

The outcome at the individual level is thus a self-regulating agent who has a natural tendency to do both good things and the right things, who evaluates others both individually and in terms of group norms, and who uses the potential evaluations of both specific others and of social norms in general as regulatory principles to guide her own behavior. These individual prosocial tendencies and group-minded normative tendencies often interact and even compete with one another in complex ways throughout ontogeny, and they both compete constantly with children’s naturally selfish tendencies as well. Moreover, all of these tendencies are modified significantly by socialization and culture such that they might eventually look quite distinct across different groups and individuals. Understanding how these different tendencies and self-regulatory processes come together as children develop and socially learn from others in a rich cultural context is a worthy research agenda for developmental psychologists of all theoretical persuasions.

References

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Amrisha Vaish and Michael Tomasello


Culture is central to morality, with culture including not only prescriptions about behavior but also meanings and practices that form part of everyday social reality (e.g., D’Andrade, 1984; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). As Shweder (1999) notes, culture involves “community specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful and efficient that are . . . constitutive of different ways of life, and play a part in the self-understanding of members of the community” (p. 212). Despite culture’s centrality to psychological experience, however, theorists of moral reasoning tend to downplay the significance of cultural differences in moral reasoning. From the social domain perspective (e.g., Turiel, 1983, 2002), cultural variation is seen as arising primarily from contrasting informational assumptions and as not reflecting basic differences in moral values. Cultural research by social domain theorists is undertaken primarily to provide evidence for the universality of social domain distinctions and of certain basic moral concerns (e.g., Neff, 2003; Nucci, 1997; Nucci, Turiel, & Encarnacion-Gawrych, 1983; Song, Smetana, & Kim, 1987; Yau & Smetana, 2003) and to highlight cases in which individuals are faced with infringements on their basic human rights and may be actively resisting such oppression (e.g., Neff, 2001; Turiel, 1998, 2006; Wainryb, Smetana, & Turiel, 2008). Claims made in work on morality and culture from a cultural psychology perspective tend to be rejected by social domain theorists, as they are seen as leading to the untenable stance of an extreme moral relativism and as embodying stereotypical positions that fail to give weight to contextual influences or to attend to the impact of power dynamics on social relations (e.g., Killen, 1997; Turiel, 2002).

The goal of this chapter is to provide a critical analysis of cultural psychology research on morality, identifying contributions and limitations, as well as challenges, of this work. We begin with a presentation of core conceptual assumptions of cultural psychology. We follow this with an overview of research on culture and moral development, with consideration given to the implications of this work and to future directions for work on culture and morality.

Foundations
This section presents a brief overview of key theoretical premises of cultural psychology. Cultural psychology refers to a perspective that recognizes the essential role of culture in

Symbolic Views of Culture

Within the perspective of cultural psychology, culture is understood in symbolic terms as meanings and practices and not merely in ecological terms as objective adaptive affordances and constraints (D’Andrade, 1984; LeVine, 1984; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Developmental psychology has long given attention to ecological aspects of the context (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eccles et al., 1993). Ecological approaches take into account that families, schools, and larger communities present individuals with resources and experiences that enhance or impede particular developmental outcomes. While an ecological perspective on culture is essential in highlighting the adaptive significance of settings, it is also important to view culture not merely in terms of objective affordances and constraints but to recognize its symbolic properties. From the symbolic perspective, cultural meanings and practices are understood as bearing an open relationship to objective adaptive affordances and constraints rather than as merely functionally based (LeVine, 1984; Shweder, 1984; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989).

Within a symbolic view, culture is seen in representational, directive, and constitutive terms (D’Andrade, 1984). It is well known that, in terms of its representational functions, cultural meaning systems encompass knowledge structures that provide information about the nature of reality, and, in terms of its directive functions, cultural meaning systems encompass prescriptive social rules. However, it is less widely appreciated that, in terms of its constitutive functions, cultural meaning systems function to create social realities that serve to define the shared meanings that are accorded to particular entities or experiences (Searle, 1969; Shweder, 1984). Thus, for example, the culturally constituted category of a “bride” only has meaning against the backdrop of the agreement within a community to associate particular meanings and institutional practices with this social role. The present considerations imply that appraisals of harm, such as the judgment that abortion constitutes murder, are not based merely on biological criteria. Rather, such appraisals depend on culturally variable definitions of the meanings to be accorded objective entities and events, such as the definition of the point when a fetus is to be treated as a person entitled to protection from harm. As applied to evaluating cross-cultural differences in moral judgment, the present assumptions imply that the relative adequacy of the knowledge assumptions that are brought to bear in moral reasoning (e.g., Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987; Wainryb, 1991) cannot be fully comparatively evaluated in terms of objective criteria, such as the magnitude of harm involved, but reflect, in part, culturally based values that affect how harm is understood.

Integrating Concerns With Power and Meaning

The need to recognize the importance of power dynamics in patterning cultural forms represents an insight that not only has been prominent within postmodern anthropological
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work (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1993; Appadurai, 1988) but one that is strongly emphasized by theorists within the social domain tradition (Turiel, 1998; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994; Wainryb, Smetana, & Turiel, 2008). It is recognized that individuals assume contrasting positions of power within societies and that cultural meanings and practices may perpetuate social relations based on inequality. Thus, for example, a cultural concern with hierarchy is seen as associated with social institutions in which women are given fewer opportunities than men and are therefore more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

While acknowledging the critical importance of recognizing the role of power in structuring social institutions, a cultural psychology perspective raises the need to integrate a concern with power with a concern for symbolic aspects of culture. The argument is that while individuals maintain an active perspective on their cultural practices, dissent tends to be formulated in ways that in most cases do not call for a total abandonment of fundamental cultural commitments and thus that do not simply converge cross-culturally. This type of insight may be illustrated in a comparative study examining conceptions of everyday family roles and of feminism among samples of middle-age women from Japan and the United States (Schaberg, 2002). While calling for greater flexibility and accommodation in gender role expectations, the Japanese women rejected the egalitarian model of marital relations emphasized by U.S. respondents.

Dynamic Views of Culture

A stance that overstates the thematic nature of culture may be criticized as glossing over the heterogeneity and overlap in meanings between and within cultural communities and thus as giving rise to stereotypical claims. This type of stance characterizes contemporary work in cultural psychology that has embraced the individualism/collectivism dichotomy (e.g., Nisbett, 2003; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). Having roots in the individualism–collectivism distinction of early work in cross-cultural psychology (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1998), this perspective gained widespread acceptance after: (a) the publication of Markus and Kitayama’s (1997) seminal article proposing that cultural variation could be understood in terms of differences between an independent versus interdependent self and; (b) the creation of assessment techniques, such as the interdependent/independent self construal scale (Singelis, 1994). The Singelis (1994) scales were embraced as seeming to provide an easy way to measure culture that did not depend on any localized cultural understandings or direct experience with a particular culture. This type of perspective has come to dominate much contemporary cultural work in traditional social psychology and, to a lesser extent, cultural work in developmental psychology (e.g., Greenfield, 1994).

However, despite its contemporary emphasis in certain traditions of work in cultural psychology, embracing of the independent/interdependent self dichotomy is not a constitutive premise of cultural psychology. Cultural psychology represents an interdisciplinary perspective whose historical roots predate this distinction and that takes into account key anthropological insights about culture (Miller, 1997, 2002, 2004; Shweder, 1979a, 1979b, 1990; Shweder & LeVine, 1984; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). To give an example, in a seminal early edited volume on culture theory that predated work on the interdependent/ independent self construal distinction, Shweder and LeVine (1984) presented a series of
papers that addressed many of the issues raised by contemporary critics of cultural work
in the social domain tradition, such as consideration of the extent cultural systems are
integrated and the status to be given to informational assumptions in understanding varia-
tion in cultural beliefs. Also, many contemporary theorists associated with cultural psy-
chology are sharply critical themselves of this type of perspective (e.g. Miller, 1997, 2002;
Strauss, 2000) for its inattention to variation between and within cultural groups and for
its stereotypical, if not pejorative, portrayal of cultural outlooks, and do not embrace the
individualism/collectivism dichotomy in their empirical research.

With the exception of the investigators associated with cultural psychology who have
embraced the individualism–collectivism dichotomy, there is agreement between cultural
psychologists and both social domain and postmodern theorists about the need to recog-
nize the multifaceted, dynamic, and frequently conflicting nature of cultural meanings and
practices. However, approaches within cultural psychology take exception with positions
that interpret this concern to imply that it is impossible to identify any group differences
in cultural outlooks and that culture represents merely a contextual effect (Miller, 1997).
In fact, drawing distinctions between cultural perspectives is considered critical in efforts
to give voice to viewpoints that otherwise could not be distinguished from what is the
default mainstream outlook in psychological theory (Graham, 1992).

Context-Dependent Nature of Cultural Influences

Whereas some work from an individualism/collectivism perspective has portrayed cul-
tural influences on behavior as noncontextually dependent (e.g., Oyserman, Coon, &
Kemmelmeier, 2002), this does not represent a defining stance within cultural psychology.
Rather, much work from a cultural psychology perspective takes into account that cul-
tural influences on psychological phenomena are contextually dependent.

In fact, work from a cultural psychology perspective underscores the importance of
attending both to culture and context in psychological explanation. To give an example,
experimental research on the self-descriptions of U.S. and Japanese adult populations both
predicted and observed culturally variable patterns of cross-cultural differences (Cousins,
1989). U.S. respondents employed more abstract self-descriptions on a de-contextualized
rather than contextualized self-description task, whereas Japanese respondents displayed
the reverse contextual effect. This interaction of culture and context reflected the differ-
ential meaning of the contextual manipulation in each culture, with Japanese respondents
experiencing it as unnatural to describe the self in the condition that supplied no infor-
mation about the context, and U.S. respondents experiencing the de-contextualized task
as the more meaningful. In sum, within cultural psychology, explanation attends not only
to the situational factors typically considered in all psychological explanation but also to
cultural meanings that impact how contexts are understood and psychological responses.

Pragmatic Relativism

A key theoretical premise of cultural psychology is the adoption of pragmatic relativism as
a stance that forms a middle ground between the poles of either absolute universalism or
extreme relativism (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Shweder, in press). This kind of sensibility may be
seen in Shweder’s position linking cultural psychology with culturally grounded forms of comparative moral appraisal rather than with extreme relativism:

[M]y version of cultural psychology fully acknowledges that there is no way to avoid making critical judgments about good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, efficient and inefficient. . . . Any culture deserving of respect, must be defensible in the face of criticism from “outside.” Indeed, in my view one of the distinctive features of cultural psychology is that it is willing to try to make that defense, representing the “inside” point of view in such a way that it can be understood, perhaps appreciated, or at the very least tolerated from an “outside” point of view. (Shweder, 2000, p. 216)

Reflecting this type of position, in their recent edited volume examining issues of culture conflict involving immigrant populations in the United States, Shweder, Minow, and Markus (2002) explored the difficult decisions and weightings of moral sensibilities that must occur in cases in which the native practices of immigrant populations are illegal in order to achieve public policy that is both culturally sensitive and ethically sound. If theorists such as Shweder and the other contributors to the volume subscribed to an extreme moral relativism, there would be no need for such an exploration, since in all cases, local practices within a family would be privileged. In sum, whereas appraisals of cultural practices tend to be more relativistic within cultural psychology than in the social domain or cognitive–developmental approaches to morality, this difference is not reflective of the endorsement of extreme moral relativism or of a culturally blind ethnocentrism within any of the approaches.

Current Research in Moral Development and Culture

The discussion below presents an overview of contemporary research on culture and moral development. We organize the discussion in terms of different moral content areas.

Justice

Issues of justice assume a central role in all moral codes. However, whereas justice and harm are considered aspects of morality universally, marked cross-cultural variation exists in everyday moral judgment involving justice. As discussed below, this variation occurs not only in the weight given to justice relative to competing moral and nonmoral considerations but also in the identification of issues as involving harm or injustice.

In regard to the weighting of justice concerns, cultural variation exists in the priority given to interpersonal commitments over competing justice expectations. This trend may be seen in vignette-based experimental research conducted among U.S. and Indian adult and child respondents that assessed the resolutions of conflict situations in which fulfillment of justice issues conflicted with interpersonal obligations (Miller & Bersoff, 1992). While no cross-cultural differences occurred in life-threatening situations, Indian respondents more frequently than U.S. respondents gave priority to the interpersonal obligations in non-life-threatening cases. For example, most U.S. respondents judged that it was morally wrong to steal an unattended train ticket left on a bench in a train station, even if taking
the ticket was the only way to fulfill one’s commitment to attend a best friend’s wedding, while most Indian respondents judged that stealing the train ticket was morally justified. The present type of work calls into question the universality of the distinction between actions and omissions that is reflected in the Kantian notion of perfect versus imperfect duties (Gert, 1988; Kant, 1797/1964; Urmson, 1958). In this regard, it has been shown that rural Mayan participants do not show what had been assumed to be a universal omission bias to judge actions that directly cause harm as worse than actions in which harm results from an agent’s inaction (i.e., omission bias) (Abarbanell & Hauser, 2010). Thus, Mayan respondents did not consider pushing a man in front of an oncoming speeding truck as less morally permissible than failing to warn a man in time to avoid the speeding truck.

Other related research has documented that Indians more frequently than U.S. populations treat contextual factors that reduce control over the situation, such as emotional duress or immaturity, as reducing agents’ moral accountability for justice violations (Bersoff & Miller, 1993). Thus, even in cases in which agreement exists about the moral status of justice violations, contrasting weighing of competing moral concerns or of potential extenuating circumstances leads to cultural variation in everyday moral judgments of harm and injustice.

Cultural variation also arises in identification of cases as involving harm or injustice, with this variation related to cultural differences in conceptions of harm and in definitions of persons seen as entitled to protection from harm. For example, in terms of cultural variation in conceptions of harm, whereas all U.S. fourth grade children treated chewing gum in social conventional terms, as indicated by their judgments that such a practice would be acceptable if it was allowed in another school (Turiel, 1983), all Japanese fifth grade children judged that it would still be unacceptable even if allowed in another school (Naito, Ibusuki, Lin, & Rhee, 1991). This cultural difference arose from the Japanese children defining harm more broadly than did the U.S. students, with the Japanese children expressing concerns that the teacher’s mind could be harmed by the students’ actions of chewing gum in class. In terms of variation related to contrasting conceptions of personhood, research has also documented that within Hindu Indian culture, entities seen as entitled to protection from harm extend to all forms of life (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987; Vasudev & Hummel, 1987). Thus, refraining from eating or otherwise harming animals tends to be considered a moral issue rather than a matter of personal choice. In turn, other examples show the definition of personhood being drawn more broadly among U.S. than among Indian populations. Thus, for example, in assuming that females should be extended equal personhood to males when it comes to inheritance practices, U.S. adults but not Hindu Indian adults consider inheritance practices that disadvantage females to be a moral violation (Shweder et al., 1987).

**Morality of Caring**

Interpersonal responsiveness has always been considered as an aspect of morality because it concerns issues of welfare; however, within the Kantian tradition that informs the work of theorists such as Kohlberg and Turiel, interpersonal responsiveness has been assumed to have a superordinate or discretionary moral status, rather than the fully obligatory status of justice morality (Kahn, 1992). Gilligan (Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Gillian, Ward, Taylor, &
Bardige, 1988; Gilligan & Wiggins, 1988) challenged this assumption and argued for the need to recognize caring as a fully moral concern. The morality of caring, in Gilligan’s view, is based on feelings of caring that develop in the experience of close relationships. As seen in the example below of a caring response by an 11-year-old female, caring entails individual discretion:

If you have a responsibility with somebody else, then you should keep it to a certain extent, but to the extent that it is really going to hurt you or stop you from doing something that you really want, then I think maybe you should put yourself first. (Gilligan, 1982, pp. 35–36)

From the perspective of the connected view of self, caring should allow for individuality, with the ideal family, for example, seen as one “where everyone is encouraged to become an individual and at the same time everybody helps others and receives help from them” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 54).

Cultural research points to qualitative variation in the forms that interpersonal morality takes in different cultural contexts, with this research pointing to interpersonal morality as having a more perceived obligatory and societal character than assumed by Gilligan and her colleagues. For example, in a program of comparative research conducted among U.S. and Hindu Indian adult and child populations, Miller and her colleagues demonstrated that, with their cultural emphasis on dharma or duty (O’Flaherty & Derrett, 1978), Hindu Indians show a greater tendency than do European Americans to treat responsiveness to the needs of friends and family members as a moral obligation that is not significantly affected by the level of need involved (Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990), degree of liking for the other party (Miller & Bersoff, 1998), presence of competing justice expectations (Miller & Bersoff, 1992), or level of cost (Miller & Bersoff, 1995). While both Americans and Indians consider being responsive to the needs of family and friends as highly desirable, Americans tend to treat helping in such cases in more voluntaristic terms than do Indians.

Research conducted among East Asian populations has further documented approaches to the morality of caring that differ not only from those of Americans but also from those discussed above among Indians. In work conducted among Japanese adolescents, Shimizu (2001), for example, uncovered an approach to interpersonal morality that centers on issues of omoiyari or empathy within one’s in-group. In contrast to the claims made about the morality of caring by Gilligan and her colleagues based on U.S. data, Shimizu documented that in Japanese cultural contexts, caring tends to be experienced as a communal responsibility rather than as an individually based feeling. It is to be considered a normative perspective that is supported by Japanese society rather than as an individually based voice that conflicts with the justice orientation of the larger society. In turn, moral reasoning research conducted among Chinese populations emphasizes what is perceived to the affectively grounded moral tendency of jen, “the deep affection for kin rooted in filial piety and extended through the family circle to all men” (Dien, 1982, p. 334).

Research conducted among U.S. populations of different religious backgrounds extends this work by suggesting that the trends observed among U.S. respondents may be influenced by the value placed within Christianity on acting in accord with one’s mental states (Cohen & Rozin, 2001). This work has demonstrated that, compared to Protestant
respondents, Jewish respondents are more prone to judge that an adult son who cares for his elderly parents even though he does not like them has honored his parents. In providing evidence that Jews tend to consider inner states to be less relevant than do Protestants in making moral judgments, such findings point to within-culture sources of variation in interpersonal moral outlooks.

**Moralities of Divinity and Non-Harm-Based Moralities**

Cultural research reveals that spiritual concerns entail distinctive epistemological assumptions that impact moral commitments. Thus, in a study of extraordinary moral exemplars, Colby and Damon (1992) documented that many individuals attributed their value commitments and motivation to their religious faith—e.g., “I didn’t know how I was doing it (helping them) or why, but I know the Holy Spirit was leading me . . .” (p. 354). In another example, in research among a relatively secular Canadian sample, Walker and his colleagues (Walker, Pitts, Hennig, & Matsuba, 1995) documented that individuals cited religion, faith, and spiritual concerns in providing justifications for their moral outlooks, with these concerns including not only contrasting epistemological presuppositions, such as fear of eternal damnation, but also moral principles, such as agape love, a strong positive emotion that involves self-sacrifice and that is seen as of and from God.

However, beyond providing motivation for morality, spiritual concerns and the epistemological presuppositions that they entail have been found to influence the identification of issues of harm, injustice, and welfare. For example, in a study that contrasted the moral outlooks of both orthodox and progressive Hindu Indian communities with those of both Orthodox and progressive U.S. Christian communities, Jensen (1998) documented that the groups drew on their spiritual outlooks in making markedly different interpretations of the practice of widow burning (*sati*). Thus, whereas the Orthodox Americans tended to treat such an act as an immoral violation of God’s law, nearly a third of the Orthodox Hindu Indians viewed such behavior as morally required, as an Orthodox Hindu woman explained, “the wife dies with her husband in order to (preserve) her chastity and (show) her devotion to her husband” (Jensen, 1998, p. 101). In both of these cases, the respondents based their moral outlooks on their understandings of the divine order. In turn, the individualistic outlook maintained by many of the progressivist Americans led them to privilege freedom of choice over harm in this situation, arguing that the act of *sati* represents a matter of personal choice rather than of morality: “To me it’s not morally wrong. I don’t like it . . . but if that’s what she chooses to do, that’s what she chooses to do. . . . If that person wants to commit suicide, they can commit suicide” (Jensen, 1998, p. 101). As the example of *sati* illustrates, background assumptions grounded in contrasting religious and cultural traditions impact not only epistemological premises, like the assumed presence of god’s will or of an afterlife, but also on the extent to which the same behavior is interpreted in polar opposite ways—i.e., not only in cases as a morally prescribed versus morally proscribed action but also, in other cases, as a morally protected right to life versus a morally protected right to take one’s own life.

Work on themes of divinity also highlights the need to understand morality as extending beyond issues of harm, welfare, or rights. In this regard, research conducted among U.S. and Brazilian populations of lower socioeconomic status demonstrates that issues
perceived to involve extremely disgusting or disrespectful actions, such as using the national flag as a bathroom rag, are regarded as involving violations of purity or divinity and not as involving harm (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993). Research also documents the socially embodied character of morality, with targets of disgust evoking moral condemnation. Thus, for example, reflecting Hindu Indian outlooks that entail concerns about pollution of the self, with people seen as linked along bloodlines, many issues of hygiene and food choice are considered moral issues among Indians, while being treated as matters of personal choice among Americans (Haidt, Rozin, McCauley, & Imada, 1997).

**Implications**

In terms of implications, work on culture and morality highlights the commonality that exists in the agenda and theoretical assumptions of work in the social domain and cultural psychology traditions. The work also underscores challenges that arise in taking into account the distinctive insights of each perspective.

To give an example, Turiel, Killen, and Helwig (1987) argue that the documented tendency of Indians, but not of Americans, to consider it as a moral violation for a widow to wear jewelry and bright-colored clothes after the death of her husband (Shweder et al., 1987) reflects the beliefs held by Indians that the husband’s spirit continues to exist even after his death and would suffer negative consequences from the widow’s actions. It is further assumed that in such belief-mediated cases, cultural variation in moral outlooks could ultimately be reconciled through the verification of factual knowledge.

It is important to recognize, however, that in the present types of cases, theorists in the social domain and cultural psychology traditions agree about the idea that cultural variation in epistemological assumptions and societal practices underlies much of the variation observed in concrete moral judgments. As Shweder (in press) argues,

> “Many cultural anthropologists who are attracted to cultural relativism ultimately trace the source of cross-cultural diversity in concrete moral judgments to differences in world view or beliefs and to the particular sub-set of universal goods privileged in any particular cultural or historical tradition of values.”

Given the nonrational nature of many cultural presuppositions and values (Shweder, 1984), theorists from a cultural psychology perspective, however, assume that differences in value or knowledge are not in all cases susceptible to adjudication by means of empirical criteria. Also, the stance of attempting to separate the content from the process of moral reasoning is seen as giving rise to universals that are at such an abstract level that they do not predict or explain everyday moral judgment.

Theorists in the social domain tradition also reject what they see as the tendency for work in cultural psychology to be informed by the individualism–collectivism framework (e.g., Wainryb, 1997). This assumption leads social domain theorists to charge that work in cultural psychology overstates the extent of cross-cultural variation in moral outlooks and fails to recognize the degree to which individuals experience hierarchically structured social relations as oppressive. To give an example, Smetana and her colleagues (Smetana et al., 2009) portray Miller et al. (1990) as making the claim that “Americans view individuals
as being morally obligated to help only in extreme circumstances and in cases where children have serious needs in the family” (p. 289, emphasis added)—a claim that they argue is refuted by their findings that European American adolescents judge that teens are morally obligated to help their parents even in low-need situations. In turn, in an example of claims made that work in cultural psychology fails to appreciate the concern with individual rights universally, Turiel (2002) argues:

[T]he distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures is, in part, based on the idea that freedoms and rights are prominent in the former and minimized in the latter. Whereas individual freedoms and rights are said to be central in a rights-based morality of Western cultures, duties, fulfillments of social roles, and maintenance of social order are said to be central in the duty-based morality of non-Western cultures. (p. 78)

Challenging this premise that they associate with all work in cultural psychology, social domain theorists point to a range of studies, such as ones conducted among the Druze community as well as in India (e.g., Neff, 2001; Turiel, 1998; Wainryb, 1997; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994), which demonstrate that women resist what they perceive to be unfair male-dominated practices and express concerns for greater personal autonomy.

It is important, however, not to stereotype work from a cultural psychology perspective but rather to recognize that much of this work is not informed by an individualism–collectivism perspective and thus not vulnerable to these types of critiques. For example, the claims made by Miller and her colleagues (e.g., Miller, 1994b) about cross-cultural differences in moral outlook between Hindu Indian and European American populations are not based on the findings from a single study, but rather on an extended body of research that shows not only significant commonalities in outlooks between Indian and U.S. populations but documents the contextual dependence of moral judgments within both cultural groups. While a claim about Americans viewing individuals as being morally obligated to help only in particular circumstances may be accurate in summarizing findings observed in a single study, it is inaccurate to interpret such a statement as a claim about global cross-cultural differences that apply under all circumstances. Also, while it is valid to note that only relatively limited attention has been given to date to the outlooks of socially disadvantaged groups within research from a cultural psychology perspective, it cannot be claimed that concerns with individual autonomy have been overlooked in cultural psychology. Recent work within cultural psychology not only has documented that a sense of choice tends to be associated with perceived duties to family and friends among Hindu Indian populations (Miller, Das, & Chakravarthy, 2011) but also highlights the need to take cultural meanings into account in understanding how dissent is expressed. Thus, in a study that analyzed the narratives of Gujarati women who were describing how they negotiated conflict between their own wishes and others’ expectations, Raval (2009) demonstrated that the women were actively engaged in negotiating the resolution of these conflicts. Notably, the approach that the women adopted reflected a relational form of agency that occurred within the parameter of family roles. Rather than rejecting family expectations, the women gave considerable weight to the welfare of their children and grandchildren, rather than only to more individually centered goals.
The present considerations imply that it is important not to overstate the differences in outlook between the social domain and cultural psychology traditions but to recognize that work in cultural psychology, while more relativistic than work in the social domain tradition, overlaps considerably in its goals, outlooks, and premises with work in the latter tradition. The criticisms raised of the individualism–collectivism dichotomy are well taken and even echoed in similar criticisms raised by theorists within cultural psychology (e.g., Miller, 2002). However, it is important for social domain theorists not to use this type of critique as a straw-person argument to dismiss all work in cultural psychology, just as it is important for theorists within cultural psychology to acknowledge the many important contributions of contemporary work in the social domain tradition, such as the attention given not only to issues of resistance and dissent but also to social stereotyping (e.g., Killen, Kelly, & Richardson, 2010) and to the perspective of populations experiencing extreme conditions, such as war (e.g., Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2010).

**Future Directions and Conclusions**

Bringing a developmental perspective to cultural work on moral development represents an important direction for future research. This type of focus is needed to respond to gaps in contemporary approaches to moral development, which have tended to emphasize the early developmental availability of moral outlooks and to de-emphasize age-related change. Equally, such a focus has the potential to go beyond the tendency in much contemporary cultural work to embody a fax model of cultural transmission, which assumes, at least implicitly, that children receive cultural messages in a process of passive reproduction.

The inattention to developmental differences in contemporary approaches to moral development reflects, in part, the reliance on child-centered methodologies, such as the criterion probe approach, which yield evidence of greater commonality in outlook across age groups than had been observed in earlier approaches. With the field of developmental psychology in a post-Piagetian era that emphasizes nativist positions (Newcombe, 2011), many contemporary theoretical models also tend more generally to downplay the idea of development. Equally, contemporary work in cultural psychology has tended to yield data on the endpoints of developmental change or to include age comparisons but to give only limited attention to respects in which the outlooks associated with particular age groups reflect developmental concerns. In part, as a consequence, cultural approaches have by default tended to portray cultural learning as a relatively automatic process in which cultural messages are transmitted perfectly across generations without modification or resistance.

One of the important goals to be achieved in a cultural developmental psychology of morality is to identify age-related variation in how children engage with cultural messages as well as to better capture the active nature of cultural internalization (Csordas, 2009). An example of the promise of this type of approach may be seen in a recent study that examined how conceptions of morality and spirituality held by adult members of the Word of God Community, a hierarchically structured and Orthodox Christian charismatic community, were transmitted to their children. The process through which children came to internalize the worldview of this community was observed to reflect the children’s
developing cognitive and social abilities, with 5- to 7-year-old children understanding the community’s cultural prescriptions for moral life in relatively unquestioning naturalized terms. In contrast, reflecting the more reflective outlook they had come to emphasize with adolescence, teenage members of the community were observed to “actively resist, reflect on, and reconstruct the moral code in a process of cultural creation, self-constitution, and spiritual development” (Csordas, 2009, p. 436).

Another valuable goal to be achieved in a cultural developmental psychology of morality is to gain a broader appreciation of the processes through which moral messages are communicated and the respects in which children, with their developing needs and abilities, impact these processes. In this regard, for example, Fung and Smith (2009) point to the ways that the Confucian value of filial piety is socialized in everyday caregiver–child interactions among Taiwanese families through an emphasis on having the child know shame, which is viewed as a moral sense in which the individual closely reflects on their behaviors, admits inadequacy and wrongdoing, and amends and improves themselves. The sense of moral shame is cultivated not only through a rich lexicon of shame words in Chinese but also through processes of socialization that involve prototypic shaming interactions that cast the child in an unfavorable light through explicit expressions of shame (e.g., “you made your mother lose face,” p. 276), threats of abandonment (e.g., “we’ll give you away to the neighbor upstairs,” p. 276), and disparaging attributions (e.g., “how come you’re so sissy,” p. 276). Although these attributions might seem harsh to a cultural outsider, they have been linked with positive, adaptive outcomes and with warm feelings toward the caregivers, as well as with the child coming to internalize a sense of conscience. These routine caregiver–child shame interactions also have been observed to shift in response to the child’s changing developmental needs and abilities, while also meeting with resistance and reinterpretation by the children. Thus, Fung and Smith (2009) illustrate that by age 4, the child’s roles in these shaming events came to incorporate a wider variety of roles, including not only passive stances such as confessing, but also more active ones, such as negotiating, provoking, and resisting, with the shaming events becoming much less evident with increasing age in response to the child’s increasing maturity.

Finally, another valuable direction for a developmental cultural psychology is to explore common and culturally variable age changes in moral outlooks. A project for future research is to examine age differences in children’s understanding of different moral content areas, such as concepts related to ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity (Jensen, 2011). In this regard, it may be expected that certain age-related changes will follow a universal developmental path, with, for example, understandings of ideas of community with increasing age coming to encompass a wider range of social groups other than the family and friends. In turn, it also may be expected that other age-related changes will reflect the cultural variation in moral judgments observed in these various content areas, as well as in the relative cultural emphasis given to different types of moral concerns.

In conclusion, it is important in future research to recognize the many commonalities in assumptions, goals, and agendas of research on moral development within cultural psychology as compared with work in more universalistic traditions. While research to date has documented marked cultural variation in moral outlooks, challenges remain in integrating concerns with power relations, as well as issues of development, in future cultural work.
References


Part V

Prejudice, Social Cognition, and Intergroup Attitudes
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2010, on average, women earned 37% less than men who were in equivalent jobs with equivalent levels of education.

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)

Currently, lesbian and gay couples can obtain a legal, state recognized civil marriage or civil union (with equal state benefits associated with civil marriage for heterosexual couples) in only 17 states and the District of Columbia within the U.S. Conversely, as of 2012, 27 states have passed constitutional amendments banning marriage and/or any form of relationship recognition for same-sex couples, essentially making any laws that might protect same-sex couples unconstitutional in those states.

(Movement Advancement Project, 2012)

Introduction

As evidenced by citations from the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) and Movement Advancement Project (2012), differential or discriminatory treatment based on gender and sexual orientation is pervasive in the United States. While gender and sexual orientation are foundational dimensions of one’s identity, they are also salient social categories used by individuals to make sense of their social worlds and to make decisions regarding everyday social situations and interactions (Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006). Given the importance of gender and sexual orientation as social categories, people often base their attitudes and behaviors toward others on their beliefs, stereotypes, and expectations related to gender and sexual orientation. In some instances, individuals view differential attitudes and behaviors as inherently unfair, prejudicial, or discriminatory. In many instances, however, individuals justify their attitudes or behavior as legitimate based on their perception of the inherent differences amongst people related to gender or sexual orientation (e.g., men and women just like different things) or based on their beliefs about “appropriate” and “normal” roles and behaviors for men and women in a given culture or society (e.g., heterosexuality is the only natural or normal form of sexuality).
Discrimination has been defined as the unjust or prejudicial treatment of others based on group membership or social category (Oxford, 2012). Despite the fact that discrimination is inherently a moral issue, individuals’ beliefs and attitudes about differential treatment of others based on gender and sexual orientation are complex and involve both moral and nonmoral elements. That is, discrimination related to gender and sexual orientation involves individuals’ beliefs about what is fair and just. It also includes their beliefs about the fundamental nature of gender and sexual orientation as inherent and biologically determined properties of human beings, their historically and culturally mediated attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and what it means to be a man or woman in a particular society, as well as their stereotypes associated with these social identities (Horn, 2012).

The formation of individuals’ beliefs and attitudes regarding their own and others’ gender and sexual orientation begins at a very young age and continues to develop throughout childhood and adolescence (Horn, 2007a; Martin & Ruble, 2002). Because of this, stereotypes and prejudice based on gender and sexual orientation and the factors related to whether individuals view differential treatment based on these social categories as a moral issue often originate during these developmental periods. Examining how young people reason about discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation is an important undertaking in terms of offering solutions for more equitable treatment of all individuals.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to review research regarding children and adolescents’ social reasoning about their interpersonal and intergroup interactions based on gender and sexual orientation and the factors related to how individuals’ construct an understanding of these interactions as moral. The chapter has four sections. First, we will discuss the relevant theoretical frameworks related to discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation in childhood and adolescence. Second, we will briefly define what we mean by gender and sexual orientation. Third, we will review current developmental research regarding differential attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and interactions related to gender and sexual orientation. Finally, we will discuss the implications of this research for educational policy and practice, young people’s development, as well as future avenues for research.

**Theoretical Background**

Social cognitive domain theory (Nucci, 2001; Smetana, 2011; Turiel, 1983, 1998), a developmental framework frequently used to investigate heterogeneity in individuals’ social judgments and reasoning, is inherently suited to increasing an understanding of discrimination. This theory can account for complexity and variation in social reasoning both within and between individuals and provides a strong framework for studying stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination related to gender, gender identity/expression, and sexual orientation (Horn & Nucci, 2006; Sinno & Killen, 2011).

The main tenet of social cognitive domain theory is that individuals draw upon a number of conceptual frameworks or domains in formulating judgments about and evaluating their social worlds (Turiel, 1983, 1998). These frameworks or domains include individuals’ understandings of human welfare, rights, and fairness (moral reasoning); their understandings of consensually determined standards of conduct particular to a given social group that emerge to coordinate social interaction and social discourse (social–conventional reasoning), as well as their understanding of individuals as autonomous beings that have
individual preferences, traits, attributes, talents, and choices (personal reasoning). Further, social cognitive domain theorists posit that these domains of social reasoning are conceptually distinct, develop independently from one another, and emerge out of different types of social interactions (Smetana, 2006).

In addition to these domains of social reasoning, domain theorists posit that individuals’ beliefs, values, and assumptions about the nature of reality, or their “informational assumptions” (Wainryb, 1991), are also a part of individuals’ understanding of the social world, and as such contribute to the formation of social judgments. Moral judgments, for example, are predicates on information regarding the effects that actions have on the welfare of others. In the prototypical moral exemplar of hitting another person without provocation, the information employed to engage in the moral evaluation is readily apparent. That is, no provocative action precedes the hitting and resulting harm. There are other situations, however, in which culturally mediated information, particularly information that is difficult to empirically validate, forms the basis for moral judgments, such as beliefs about the nature of being a woman and the origins of homosexuality. With regard to gender and sexual orientation, individuals’ essentialist beliefs relate to their understanding of gender and sexual orientation, as well as their judgments regarding the differential treatment of individuals based on gender or sexual orientation (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Hegarty, 2002; Horn & Heinze, 2011.)

Essentialist beliefs or “psychological essentialism” (Medin & Ortony, 1989) refers to “ascribing a fixed, underlying nature, or essence, to category members” (Haslam & Levy, 2006, pg. 471). When applied to social categories such as gender or sexual orientation, essentialist beliefs render membership in these categories as biologically determined, fixed or immutable, and discrete or distinctive (having distinct boundaries between types or “kind”; Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002). Further, these beliefs provide individuals with information regarding the “essence” of a social category that is, then, determinative of the identity of individuals within that social category (e.g., women). Essentialist beliefs related to person characteristics allow individuals to make quick inferences regarding individuals based on the perceived membership of that individual within certain social categories, such as gender (Haslam & Levy, 2006).

Allport (1954) was one of the first to theorize that individuals’ prejudicial attitudes often contained essentialist beliefs regarding the nature of a particular social category (e.g., Jews). Since Allport, many other researchers, particularly social psychologists, have investigated the relationship between essentialist beliefs and prejudice and discrimination (Haslam et al., 2002). Interestingly, the ways in which essentialist beliefs relate to prejudice and discrimination differ depending on the type of social category being investigated. For example, holding essentialist beliefs about race or gender predicts higher levels of prejudice and discrimination against racial minorities and women, respectively (Haslam et al., 2002). The belief that men and women are inherently different provides individuals with a justification for the legitimization of gender inequities in society (e.g., wage differentials). Conversely, research on the relationship between essentialist beliefs and prejudice and discrimination based on sexual orientation provides some evidence that essentialist beliefs about sexual orientation predict lowers levels of prejudice and discrimination toward lesbian and gay individuals (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Horn & Heinze, 2011).

Differences in the treatment of others based on gender or sexual orientation may be related to how individuals coordinate their essentialist beliefs with other types of knowledge,
such as their socially and culturally constructed knowledge about these categories. Individuals may hold essentialist beliefs about gender (e.g., maleness or femaleness is a biologically based, inherent aspect of an individual that is immutable and defining of that individual’s identity), but how those beliefs play out in relation to individuals’ prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory behavior may be related to their informational assumptions and beliefs about appropriate roles, norms, and modes of expression for males and females within a particular culture or social context. For example, in the United States, a person who is perceived as male who wears a dress or skirt may be discriminated against or treated badly by others because he is not adhering to the prescribed norms for “masculine” dress within the United States and is, thus, violating the “essence” of what it means to be “male.” In India, however, where the norm regarding masculine dress does not prohibit a male from wearing a skirt-like garment, this same person will be treated no differently than other men because he is not violating the notion of what it means to be “male.” Social norms and conventions regarding gender are prevalent in all societies and all cultures. The specific aspects of these norms and conventions and how they distinguish between males and females, however, are historically, socially, and culturally determined.

When making decisions in everyday contexts, then, individuals must coordinate their essentialist beliefs about gender or sexual orientation, as well as how they understand the norms and conventions related to these constructs within that context in making decisions about how to fairly treat others. In fact, research utilizing social cognitive domain theory as a framework to understand children’s and adolescents’ reasoning about intergroup relations (based on gender, race, peer group membership) provides evidence of the multifaceted nature of individuals’ reasoning about intergroup relationships (Horn, 2003, 2006; Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002; Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006). Killen and colleagues argue that individuals’ understanding of intergroup relationships involves coordinating their understandings of moral considerations (fairness, rights, welfare of others) with their knowledge about groups (group stereotypes, group norms), as well as their understanding of persons (individual traits, personal choice). Further, they posit that contextual and developmental factors lead to heterogeneity in individuals’ reasoning about intergroup relations.

Gender and Sexual Orientation: Distinct but Interrelated Constructs

Gender and sexual orientation as social categories are distinct but interrelated concepts. While often conflated in research, understanding discrimination based on these categories requires that we distinguish between gender and sexual orientation and explore the unique ways that discrimination related to these categories develops. As a basic distinction, gender refers to individuals’ sense of themselves in relation to gendered categories (e.g., female, male, woman, man, feminine, masculine, transgender), while sexual orientation refers to one’s affectional, emotional, and/or physical attractions to others (e.g., bisexual, gay, lesbian, straight, queer). That is, gender is an internal sense of self and identity, while sexual orientation is a relational concept and identity.

Because gender involves both biological and socially constructed components, typically, in research and theory on gender, individuals distinguish between sex as a biological category of female, male, or intersex, and gender as a socially constructed category of femaleness/maleness or feminine/masculine/androgynous (Unger, 1979). In general, an
individual's sex is determined by biological or physiological markers such as chromosomes, external genitalia, gonads, hormones, and secondary sex characteristics. Gender, on the other hand, is socially constructed and involves the prescribed roles, behaviors, attitudes, and qualities deemed feminine or masculine within a particular historical time, culture, or society.

The biological and social components of how we understand gender and sexual orientation are interrelated and impact not only how we define and understand what it means to be a man or a woman, but also how we view and judge others in relation to their gender and/or sexual orientation. Discrimination related to these constructs is often condoned based on individuals’ beliefs about inherent differences between men or boys and women or girls, or beliefs about the normalness/naturalness of same-sex sexuality within the human species. Thus, the interplay between the biological and social components of these constructs makes understanding how best to treat each other and what constitutes a discriminatory act complex. It involves not only issues related to fairness, human welfare, and individual rights but also dimensions related to inherent aspects of people, as well as conventions and norms regarding what is appropriate within a given context (Carter & Patterson, 1982; Stoddart & Turiel, 1985).

Individuals may form stereotypical attitudes about others (e.g., girls are emotional; boys are tough; gay men are feminine; lesbians are masculine) and develop prejudicial beliefs about others (e.g., men are more capable of leadership positions than women; gay men caused AIDS to exist). Further, individuals may engage in discriminatory behaviors toward others based on their gender and/or sexual orientation (e.g., excluding a girl from school club because she is a girl; denying medical treatment to an individual because he is gay). In this chapter, we focus primarily on developmental aspects of differential attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and treatment based on gender and sexual orientation (i.e., prejudice and discrimination). (For reviews of research specifically on stereotypes, see Berenbaum, Martin, & Ruble, 2008; Martin & Ruble, 2002; Horn, 2011.)

**Review of Current Research**

In this section, we will first review research related to gender discrimination, and then we will review research related to discrimination based on sexual orientation. While gender and sexual orientation are distinct but interrelated constructs, the empirical literature typically focuses on discrimination based on one of these social identities, either gender discrimination (typically discrimination of women/girls) or sexual orientation discrimination (typically discrimination of lesbians and gay men). An emerging body of work on gender nonconformity/atypicality that investigates both gender discrimination as well as sexual orientation discrimination will be reviewed in the section most relevant to the overarching focus of the particular study.

**Gender Discrimination**

Individuals often display behaviors and attitudes toward or are placed into many roles based solely on their expectations and perceptions of gender. These expectations and perceptions are typically guided by cultural norms and assume homogeneity among the binary category of feminine and masculine. Research mainly with adults has shown consistent expectations
that men are more aggressive and women are more sensitive (Biernat & Manis, 1994; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Neff & Terry-Schmidt, 2002; Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 2000). In addition, children as young as 4 1/2 have been shown to categorize personality traits (affec-tionate/competitive) and occupations (hairdresser/carpenter) based on gender norms when only shown ambiguous characters (Bauer, Liebl, & Stennes, 1998). Individuals’ decision making about the attitudes, behaviors, and roles appropriate for men and women often lead to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination for those who defy or redefine gender norms.

Research utilizing social cognitive domain theory has found that children’s and adolescents’ reasoning about social situations that involve gender is often multifaceted (Kil-

len, Sinno, & Margie, 2007). Children experience gender stereotyping, prejudice, and
discrimination within multiple domains, including but not limited to the family, peer, and
school contexts. In the following section, we will review research examining children’s and adolescents’ reasoning about gender discrimination in some of these areas and highlight where there is room for further research to fully understand how individuals conceptualize and implement gender norms and expectations in their everyday interactions.

Family Context

Gender bias focusing on whether children adhere to masculine or feminine behaviors and roles begins within the family context. Expectations begin from infancy, with individuals attributing different personality characteristics to children still wrapped in blankets (Fagot, 1978) and parents dressing children to match these characteristics with boys in practical clothes and girls in pretty and cute clothes (O’Reilly, Penn, & deMarrais, 2001). Parents, family, and community members purchase clothing and toys discriminately and communicate differently depending on a child’s gender assignment (Fagot & Leinbach, 1993; Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006). As children age, the distribution of family chores and the types of activities in which children are expected to partake are divided along gender lines. For example, parents often reinforce caretaking roles for women by encour-
aging young girls to play with dolls and pretend to cook (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990) and in their distribution of chores, more often involving the caretaking of siblings for girls (Crouter, Manke, & McHale, 1995).

Differences in child chore and activity assignment based on gender have been found to relate to children’s own gender-role attitudes. In American middle-income families where girls held much more responsibility than boys for chores, a large gap in sibling gender-role attitudes emerged, with boys having more traditional beliefs (Crouter et al., 2000). Boys held egalitarian views if and only if the son’s role behavior was congruent with their fa-
ther’s gender-role behavior and attitudes (McHale et al., 1990). Sons of egalitarian fathers were found to be more accepting and less stigmatizing of stereotypically female activities, such as sewing, cooking, and art (Deutsch et al., 2001). In addition, it has been found that parental encouragement of both feminine and masculine tasks led to an increased involve-

Children as young as 5 are aware that decisions within the home are often divided based on gender norms, and they have been shown to rely on conventional reasoning when deciding whether a parent should choose a son or daughter to help them with a chore or activity around the house (Schuette & Killen, 2009). Children were more
likely to accept cross-gender behavior, however, if the researcher introduced the idea of discrimination based on gender. For example, children were more likely to think that daughters should be chosen to help with baking; however, if the interviewer mentioned that other mothers thought that the son should help with baking since he does not get to do it often, children considered fairness and chose the boy. Young children recognized that making decisions about activities often associated with one gender involved both social conventions and issues of justice and fairness.

Children and adolescents are also aware of and reason differently about parental roles in the home, particularly those of caretaker and breadwinner (Sinno & Killen, 2009, 2011). Participants in these studies (including 7-, 10-, 13-, and 19-year-old predominantly ethnic majority participants from the United States) thought that both mothers and fathers should be able to have a full-time job if they so desired and reasoned that it was the parent's personal choice. Yet, when comparing mothers' and fathers' decisions to be in the caretaker role, children and adolescents used gender stereotypes or conventional reasoning to explain why mothers should stay at home with a new baby and should complete most of the caretaking responsibilities even if they are working. Results from these studies further the notion that issues of gender exclusion are multifaceted and that children and adolescents think about these issues even within contexts in which they do not yet have direct experience (e.g. balancing work and family). Children begin to observe and understand gender differentiation for themselves at an early age within the home context, and their expectation that others adhere to gender norms increases as they engage in peer relationships.

Peer Context

As children begin to interact with one another in social settings, the prescription of gender norms permeates their play and interactions (Maccoby, 1998; Berenbaum, Martin, & Ruble, 2008). Children's understanding of gender impacts their beliefs about the acceptability of particular toys, games, and activities for each gender, which in turn channels their own selections regarding with what and whom to play. There is some evidence that particularly in the early and middle childhood years, children self-segregate predominantly by gender or perceived gender identity in their interactions and friendship groups (Fromberg, 1999; Martin, Eisenbud, & Rose, 1995).

Although there is separation within play and interactions, preschoolers seem to regard deviations from gender norms as less severe than moral transgressions, focusing on the importance of conforming to social conventions or regarding them as personal choice decisions (Smetana, 1986). Research with predominantly middle-income and European American elementary school-aged children in the United States showed that children deemed toys and occupations as gender appropriate simply because of cultural norms (Carter & Patterson, 1982). Children in this study judged that if boys in a different culture wanted to play with "girl" toys, then it would be okay if that culture says so. There was an increasing flexibility with age in what was deemed as appropriate toys or occupations for both genders.

When children and adolescents are questioned about the acceptability of partaking in cross-gender activities, however, this increase in flexibility appears to be more of a U-shaped function (Stoddart & Turiel, 1985). Specifically, children in the youngest (5-year olds) and oldest (13-year olds) age groups thought that participation in a gender-atypical
activity was more wrong than did children in middle childhood. The authors concluded that in kindergarten, the maintenance of gender identity is defined in physical terms, so if a girl were to play a male stereotypic game, other children might question her gender. For adolescents, gender identity becomes closely linked to psychological characteristics, and behaving in a gender-atypical manner might be deemed as violating the “essence” of that gender, leading to exclusion by others. In middle childhood, however, children often think of cross-gender activities in terms of personal choice and see it as more acceptable. While children and adolescents view gender stereotypes mostly as social–conventional and/or personal issues, there are also instances where the use of gender stereotypes infringes on a person’s rights or excludes them, turning the situation into an issue with undoubtedly moral components.

Similar to the family context, children and adolescents focus on fairness when there is a straightforward situation of exclusion. For example, when asked if it was acceptable to exclude a boy from ballet just because he was a boy, most participants said that it was unfair and he should be given a chance (Killen & Stangor, 2001). However, when a peer group situation introduced complexity, some children maintained that exclusion based on gender stereotypes was acceptable and used social–conventional reasons, such as group functioning, to justify this. For example, if there was only one truck left in the toy area, a child may think that the boy should be the one to get the last truck because the boy would have more experience with it and would fit in better with the group of boys already playing (Theimer et al., 2001).

Research on adolescents’ (10-, 13-, and 16-year-old middle-income, predominantly European American) social reasoning about after school clubs and friendship selection showed that with age, young people focus more on the importance of social conventions and personal choice in making gendered decisions (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). In this study, there was an increased acceptance about excluding girls from an all-boys music club and about a boy’s decision not to be friends with a girl, even if the exclusion was solely because of an individual’s gender. Adolescents were able to recognize that excluding someone based on gender could be unfair but weighed group cohesion and autonomy as importantly as fairness in choosing friends.

Research has found that children most often judge peer exclusion based solely on gender stereotypes as morally wrong. When complexity was added to the situation, such as the characteristics of the child who was being excluded, reasoning became more varied. If the child was being excluded because of poor abilities in the activity, then some children reasoned it would be all right to exclude him or her because the group and the child would have difficulty working together. Some children believed that it was still wrong to exclude the child, though, because it was not fair to leave the child out, and the group should accept the child’s differences. With increasing age, individuals may become more aware of the issue of fairness related to differential treatment based on gender, but they also balance these concerns with the importance of social norms and personal autonomy.

Educational Contexts

The contexts of family life and peer interactions are interpersonal in nature, and although there are certainly ways in which children are judged and discriminated against in these
contexts, much more emphasis in developmental literature has been focused on institutional gender discrimination in educational contexts. Individuals seem to focus more on morality or issues of fairness when it comes to a place where laws can be implemented to “stop” discrimination. Within the larger institutional context of the United States, there has been an explicit intention to increase gender equality, primarily for females, although implicit gender discrimination still exists (Brown, Bigler, & Chu, 2010; Spencer, Porche, & Tolman, 2003).

In 1972, through the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the U.S. Congress passed legislation declaring that no individual, based on sex, could be excluded from educational programs or activities receiving federal funding (Title IX). With the passage and subsequent implementation of Title IX, focus on discrimination based on gender within the American educational system increased. In many ways, Title IX served to create change in the organizational structure of schools and classrooms, with integration of girls and boys in both. Children and adolescents presently in the U.S. education system now expect equality in many ways from their educational institutions (Killen et al., 2002). Discrimination based on gender, however, continues to exist in the educational setting (Brown & Bigler, 2004) and leads to differential outcomes for boys and girls that can limit their future opportunities.

Within the school context, boys have often been found to dominate conversations and often silence girls within the classroom (Koch & Irby, 2002). Even as young as 3 or 4 years of age, children begin to limit their learning experiences based on self-beliefs about gender norms (Dweck, 2006). Preschoolers learn that boys can take more risks and be more active, and girls learn to be more cautious and obedient (O’Reilly et al., 2001). Children’s self-beliefs and competence beliefs about academics and sports activities show that with age their concepts of their personal abilities differ by gender. Boys tend to have more positive competence beliefs in sports and mathematics than girls, while girls tend to have more positive competence beliefs in reading and music than boys (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993). These associations have been seen at a young age; however, these aspirations largely mimic the expectations that the larger culture has on men and women, with males choosing jobs strong in the domains in math and science and females choosing jobs which are strong in language arts and also highly agentic (Eccles, 1994).

The educational system interacts with gender bias in the family as parents often endorse gender-stereotyped beliefs about academics (Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990) and this in turn affects children’s performance. For example, a mother who believes that boys are naturally more talented than girls in mathematics expects less from her daughter in this subject, and a self-fulfilling prophecy for the daughter could ensue (Eccles, Frome,Yoon, Freedman-Doan, & Jacobs, 2000). Many parents endorse the belief that boys are better at science, and fathers, in particular, will offer more explanations and scientific input to their sons than their daughters (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2002). Tenenbaum and Leaper note that mothers’ and fathers’ beliefs about their child’s scientific ability were related to the child’s feelings of self-efficacy about science, and mothers’ beliefs were further related to the child’s interest. As children are beginning to make decisions about where to focus their energies in school, there is parental pressure to maintain gender expectations. Discrimination ensues when children might be excluded or exclude themselves from learning in contexts that do not match gender norms.
Within schools, there is also differential treatment based on gender in these subjects (Jones & Wheatley, 1990). Girls often opt out of math and science when they believe that the courses are too difficult, and teachers and counselors acquiesce to these decisions (Owens, Smothers, & Love, 2003). These findings highlight that many young girls may be receiving messages that science is too difficult for them. They therefore lose interest in the topic, further decreasing their self-efficacy and limiting their options in the fields of science and technology.

As discrimination by adults, particularly after Title IX, is more likely to be implicit and subtle, recent research has been conducted to examine how aware children are of gender discrimination in their educational settings (Brown, Bigler, & Chu, 2010). Brown and Bigler (2004) found that providing contextual information was crucial to children’s acknowledgment of gender discrimination by teachers. With age (e.g., between ages 5 and 10), there was an increase in using discrimination as a plausible explanation for student outcomes, with girls more likely to see discrimination than boys. Children need attention to be drawn to past discriminatory behaviors, however, to see that discrimination could still be happening (Brown et al., 2010).

Although there have been considerable changes in the U.S. school system in regard to gender equality (Owens et al., 2003), differential treatment based on gender continues and can impact fair and just opportunities for all children. Studies directly examining children’s experiences with gender discrimination highlight the importance of gender equity training in helping girls to deal with gender bias in schools (Owens et al., 2003). However, many of these studies do not address children’s and adolescent’s social reasoning about classroom discrimination based on gender. This seems to be a crucial factor to address because if children and adolescents reason that differential treatment based on gender is in part due to social conventions, they may not think of the moral impact of these experiences. It is possible that because there have been explicit changes in the education system, children and adolescents need more guidance on how to recognize and address implicit gender discrimination. Examining social reasoning about implicit situations of gender discrimination in the schools is an important future step for moral development research.

Summary

Historically, very little research on gender roles examined why individuals maintain gender roles, the reasoning behind their categorization, or what they think about the fairness of gender stereotypes. As research from the social domain model has shown, investigating children’s reasoning about gender is of critical importance to understanding contexts in which gender discrimination occurs (Killen et al., 2006). Gender differentiation is more than a form of categorization; children place meaning and purpose behind their choices. Given the differential treatment based on gender that children are likely to experience in family, peer, and educational contexts, it is important to conduct more research on children’s and adolescent’s awareness of this treatment, their understanding of why this happens, and their reasoning about the implications of such treatment. Further, to more fully understand the complex ways that culture, class, and social context relate to gender discrimination, it is essential that research in this area expand beyond the predominantly European American, middle-class populations most frequently studied. Providing equal
opportunities for diverse children in all contexts will allow young people to reach their fullest potential by providing more flexibility in the ways they can express their gender and develop their gender identities (Polnick et al., 2007).

Sexual Orientation Discrimination

While there is a significant body of developmental literature regarding differential expectations and social interactions based on gender, very little developmental work has investigated these same issues as related to sexual orientation. One area that has received considerable attention is bullying/victimization based on sexual orientation and/or gender expression. In general, this literature has tended to document the prevalence and developmental outcomes of this type of harassment and victimization during adolescence, as well as factors that reduce this type of harassment in schools. For example, a recent report on school climate related to sexual orientation provides evidence that 85% of LGBT young people report being verbally harassed, and 41% report being physically harassed in school because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). Further, young people who experience anti-gay bullying (whether they are gay or straight) are more likely to report psychological and physical distress, disengagement from school, and increased substance use (D’Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). This research provides evidence that victimization based on sexual orientation is prevalent and explicit in young people’s lives and often causes harm to their overall health and well-being.

While it is clear from this research that there are moral implications of victimization based on sexuality, very little research has specifically examined how children and adolescents evaluate this type of harassment from a moral viewpoint. Further, even less research has examined other types of discrimination regarding sexual orientation (e.g., social exclusion, denial of resources). The few studies that have investigated these issues developmentally have investigated young people’s attitudes about sexual orientation, as well as their reasoning about exclusion and harassment based on sexual orientation. In the remainder of this section we will review research on individual and contextual factors related to peer-to-peer discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Individual Factors

Age

Based on the available research, it appears that negative attitudes and discrimination related to sexual orientation in the United States peek in middle adolescence (Horn, 2006; Marsiglio, 1993; Poteat, 2007). No studies, to date, however, have investigated age-related differences in discrimination across the entire adolescent age range. The focus of most research on prejudice and discrimination based on sexual orientation has been done with adolescent and adult populations. While it is likely the case that prejudice and discrimination related to sexual orientation occurs in childhood, the extant research in this area is scant. Further, it is likely that the childhood precursors of this type of discrimination relate to gender and gender normativity more so than sexual orientation per se.
In addition, studies have used different measures to assess adolescents’ attitudes and discrimination ranging from rejecting a friend after they come out to holding negative stereotypes and/or beliefs about sexual orientation. Interestingly, some research suggests that age may be related to some aspects of discrimination based on sexual orientation, but not others. In a study investigating adolescents’ and young adults’ attitudes and beliefs with a somewhat diverse sample in the United States, Horn (2006) found that older adolescents (ages 17–18) and young adults (ages 19–24) were more likely than younger adolescents (ages 14–16) to report having a gay or lesbian friend and increased comfort interacting with gay and lesbian peers. Similarly, with a predominantly European American sample, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig (2009) found that older adolescents were less likely to report that they could never remain friends with someone who “came out” to them than younger adolescents. Importantly, Horn (2006) also found that older adolescents and young adults were more likely to evaluate discriminatory actions (e.g. excluding, teasing) based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity as wrong and justified those judgments by stating that they were unfair or harmful to the individual (Horn, 2006). Horn did not, however, find age-related differences in adolescents’ attitudes and beliefs about the wrongness of homosexuality.

The results suggest that with age, adolescents prioritize issues of fairness and social welfare over issues of group norms, social conventions, and stereotypes in making judgments about social interactions with lesbian and gay individuals. In this way, adolescents reason differently about sexual orientation than they do gender, as they increasingly view discriminatory interactions related to sexual orientation in moral terms. Interestingly, however, these same age-related patterns were not obtained for adolescents’ beliefs about the “wrongness” of same-sex sexuality, providing some evidence that with age, individuals’ social understanding of discrimination toward lesbian and gay individuals becomes increasingly differentiated from their individual beliefs about the “acceptability” of homosexuality. A study by Horn, Szalacha, and Drill (2008) investigating the factors that predicted adolescents’ judgments about exclusion and teasing based on sexual orientation and gender conformity among a diverse sample within the United States provides additional support for this distinction. Specifically, Horn and her colleagues investigated whether adolescents’ beliefs about the acceptability of sexual orientation predicted their judgments about discrimination. Horn and colleagues found that adolescents’ attitudes about the acceptability of homosexuality (wrong or not wrong to be gay) did not predict their judgments about discrimination (exclusion or teasing) of lesbian or gay peers. Rather, adolescents’ social reasoning (e.g. fairness, religious rules, personal choice) and the belief that individuals have a right to be gay or lesbian most strongly predicted adolescents’ judgments about discrimination. Interestingly, the strongest predictor of exclusion judgments was personal choice reasoning (e.g. they can do what they want), whereas the strongest predictors of teasing judgments were religious conventions (judging teasing as OK) and fairness (judging teasing as wrong).

**Gender**

Gender is one of the most salient individual factors related to attitudes and prejudice based on sexual orientation. Overwhelmingly, research with adults provides evidence that
men hold more negative attitudes and are more prejudiced than women (Kite & Whitley, 1998). In addition, discrimination directed toward gay males is more prevalent than discrimination directed toward lesbian females (Kite & Whitley, 1998). While fewer studies have investigated these factors in adolescence, there is some evidence supporting these same patterns in young people. Horn (2006) found that boys reported being more uncomfortable interacting with lesbian and gay peers at school than girls. In addition, boys evaluated excluding and teasing a same-gender gay peer as more acceptable than girls and used more personal choice reasons (e.g., they [the excluders] can do what they want) than girls, while girls were more likely to view the issue in terms of fairness and harm.

Some evidence also suggests that the higher rate of discrimination directed toward gay males may be related to individuals’ beliefs about masculine gender norms. In a study of adolescents’ judgments about the acceptability of lesbian, gay, and gender nonconforming targets, Horn (2007b) found evidence of an interaction between sexual orientation and gender conformity in relation to adolescents’ judgments about their peers. Specifically, males judged a heterosexual target that was gender nonconforming in appearance and mannerisms as less acceptable than a gay target that was gender conforming or participated in a gender-atypical activity. Female participants, however, rated all of the lesbian targets as less acceptable than all of the heterosexual targets, regardless of gender conformity. For males, then, assumptions about male gender roles may be salient in relation to their attitudes about sexual orientation.

Beliefs About the Origins of Sexual Orientation

While judgments about discrimination may become increasingly distinct from individuals’ beliefs about sexuality, research also provides evidence that discrimination based on sexual orientation is related in some important ways to aspects of young people’s beliefs about the origins of sexual orientation. This research provides clear evidence that individuals who believe that the origins of homosexuality are biological or genetic and therefore presumed to be immutable hold more favorable attitudes about lesbian and gay people than individuals who believe that sexual orientation is a choice, and therefore presumed to be mutable (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Hegarty, 2002; Horn & Heinze, 2011). Most of this research, however, investigated the relationship between these beliefs and prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes, rather than discrimination.

A study by Horn and Heinze (2011) specifically with a diverse sample of adolescents in the United States, however, does provide some preliminary evidence that beliefs about sexual orientation are related to discriminatory judgments and behavior. This study confirms much of the previous work in this area in that individuals holding biological beliefs about homosexuality were more likely to evaluate exclusion and teasing of lesbian and gay peers as wrong, and were more likely to use moral reasoning in justifying their judgments. Unlike previous work, however, Horn and Heinze found that those who believed sexuality results from socialization (e.g., parenting), and not those who believed it was a choice, were less likely to evaluate exclusion and teasing of a lesbian or gay peer as wrong, and used more stereotypes, religious opposition, and normative assumptions in justifying these discriminatory judgments. In addition, these individuals held the most negative beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals and were the least comfortable interacting with lesbian
and gay peers. Individuals who believed that sexual orientation was a choice fell between those with biological beliefs and those with socialization beliefs.

Horn and Heinze (2011) also found that older adolescents (16–18 years of age) more frequently held biological beliefs about sexual orientation than younger adolescents (aged 14–16). These results are interesting in that they suggest that age-related differences in adolescents’ reasoning about discrimination may be related to their underlying assumptions about sexual orientation and how they coordinate this information with their knowledge about human welfare and fairness. That is, if adolescents view an individual’s sexual orientation as an innate and unchangeable aspect of their identity, they may be more likely to view negative interactions based solely on sexual orientation as harmful and therefore as a moral issue. Conversely, if adolescents view an individual’s sexual orientation as a “lifestyle choice” or as changeable in some way (i.e., caused by their behavior or the behavior of others), they may be less likely to see the harm involved in treating individuals unfairly and evaluate the action as a legitimate way to regulate individuals that do not conform to social or cultural conventions and norms.

Research investigating adolescents’ attitudes about sexual orientation and their judgments about exclusion and teasing related to both sexual orientation and gender nonconformity provides some evidence for this claim. Horn and Nucci (2003), studying a fairly diverse sample of adolescents within the United States, found that adolescents judged peers who were gender nonconforming in appearance and mannerisms as less acceptable than gender conforming peers or those who participated in gender-atypical activities, regardless of their sexual orientation. In fact, boys judged a straight individual who was nonconforming in appearance and mannerisms as less acceptable than the gay targets who conformed to gender norms or participated in gender-atypical activities. Horn and colleagues have found that adolescents evaluated excluding and teasing peers who were gender nonconforming in appearance and mannerisms as less acceptable than the gay targets who conformed to gender norms or participated in gender-atypical activities. Horn and colleagues have found that adolescents evaluated excluding and teasing peers who were gender conforming or who participated in gender-atypical activities, and they justified these judgments by making appeals to social conventions and norms (Horn & Nucci, 2003; Horn, Szalacha, & Drill, 2008). These results provide some evidence that discrimination related to sexual orientation is linked in important ways to individuals’ beliefs about gender and the essential nature of these categories.

Contextual Factors

Peers

Peer relationships play an important role in how adolescents view discrimination related to sexual orientation and can serve to decrease adolescents’ discriminatory attitudes and behaviors (Horn & Heinze, 2011) or support them (Poteat, 2007). In an interesting line of work on adolescents’ attitudes about sexual orientation, Poteat and colleagues have found evidence that adolescents’ peer groups play a socializing role in individuals’ attitudes. In two different studies with 7th- through 11th-grade, predominantly European American students in the Midwest, Poteat and colleagues found that not only was there a high degree of homogeneity of individual attitudes within peer groups but also a high degree of heterogeneity of attitudes between peer groups (Poteat, 2007; Poteat, Espelage, & Green,
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Further, Poteat (2007) also found that peer group attitudes significantly predicted later individual attitudes (controlling for previous individual attitudes). Poteat and colleagues suggest that both a selection and a socialization effect may be taking place here in that peers elect to be friends with others with similar attitudes and beliefs, but also that peer groups reinforce dominant group attitudes and beliefs among their members.

Conversely, a study conducted by Heinze and Horn (2009) provides evidence that adolescents who reported having a lesbian or gay friend evaluated excluding or teasing a lesbian or gay peer as more wrong than adolescents reporting that they have no contact with lesbian and gay people, know of gay or lesbian students at school, or personally know someone but they are not a friend. In addition, adolescents without a lesbian or gay friend made more appeals to social and gender norms, as well as beliefs about the unnaturalness of homosexuality in justifying their exclusion and teasing judgments. Taken together, these studies provide evidence that adolescents’ peer groups and peer relationships are related to the types of social knowledge they bring to bear on their judgments about discrimination related to sexual orientation. Peer groups, especially in adolescence, serve as a context in which social norms about what is acceptable and cool or unacceptable and weird get constructed, tested, agreed upon, and communicated. Often, these norms center around issues related to adolescents’ gender, gender roles, and sexuality (Horn, 2005). In making decisions regarding discrimination, then, adolescents coordinate their understanding of these norms with their own beliefs about the nature of gender and sexuality, as well as their understanding of what is fair and just. The peer group not only has an impact on the types of social norms prevalent in a particular group or context but also on how adolescents prioritize these normative assumptions in making judgments about discrimination. For example, adolescents who have a lesbian or gay friend may better understand the harmful outcomes related to discriminatory interactions based on gender and sexuality and, therefore, may be more likely to view these interactions as wrong and unfair.

Schools

Similar to research on gender discrimination, the school’s role in reducing discrimination and bullying related to sexual orientation has received considerable attention over the past decade. Much of this research has focused on the factors within schools related to safer climates for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. Overall, this research provides evidence that LGBT students feel safe in schools that have nondiscrimination and antiharassment policies that specifically prohibit these behaviors on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, that provide professional development for teachers and other school staff related to sexual orientation and creating a safe environment for LGBT students, and that have gay–straight alliances or other types of clubs or groups that support LGBT students (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009; Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010; Szalacha, 2003). In addition, LGBT students feel safer in schools that are diverse along other dimensions (e.g., race) and in which there are out LGBT students and staff (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006).

To our knowledge, however, only one study has investigated how these school factors are related to adolescents’ judgments about discrimination based on sexual orientation. In this study, Horn and Szalacha (2009) investigated the relationship between school
context and adolescents’ reasoning about excluding and teasing lesbian and gay peers and found that safe schools practices (e.g., policies, professional development, school clubs) were related to a diverse sample of adolescents’ judgments and reasoning about exclusion and teasing. Specifically, adolescents attending a school that had implemented safe school practices related to sexual orientation and gender identity were more likely to evaluate exclusion and teasing based on sexual orientation as wrong than students attending a school that had not implemented these safe school practices. Further, students in the “safe school” also used more moral reasoning and less conventional reasoning in justifying their judgments about discrimination—particularly in relation to gay male targets.

Implications and Future Directions

Institutional contexts should protect children and adolescents from discrimination, and thus it is critical that schools and other educational contexts understand how normative assumptions about gender, gender identity/expression, and sexual orientation are communicated through their policies, practices, and curriculum. For example, using gender as an organizing property within schools or classrooms (e.g., lining up in girls’ rows and boys’ rows to go to lunch) reinforces a gender binary and assumes that boys and girls are different and that those differences have meaning and value. Schools must examine not only the direct and explicit messages that are being communicated to young people about gender and sexual orientation, but also the indirect or hidden messages (what Giroux and Purpel [1983] define as the hidden curriculum) that may be contributing to young people's social experiences within school. For example, what are the reward structures for students’ achievements? Schools that provide students with “school letters” and “letter jackets” only for athletics rewards and privilege athletic skill and prowess (typically associated with traditional masculine norms) over excellence in other domains such as theater arts, fine arts, or academics (typically associated with traditional feminine norms) send an implicit message that physical strength and competence are valued more than other types of skills and can serve to reinforce gender-role stereotypes and social hierarchies within the school.

Further, there is evidence to suggest that examining gender ideology within schools has more of an impact on reducing individuals’ endorsement of gender discrimination as legitimate than simply ensuring gender equity (in terms of discussion of equal number of men/women in books, hand raising, opportunities to engage in co-curricular activities). When differential treatment based on gender is perceived as “natural” or “fair,” gender discrimination will continue to exist in schools. For instance, boys seem to be getting more teacher attention; however, the school atmosphere promotes this as acceptable because boys need that extra attention due to their nature or “essential” maleness (Spencer, Porche, & Tolman, 2003). Schools can be very aware of the importance of making things equal to all children, but their assumptions about underlying differences between boys and girls can continue to reinforce expectations based on a gender binary (Spencer et al., 2003).

Even in schools where there is a conscious effort to integrate children into the same sports programs or physical education classes, gender norms persist, with girls being perceived as more graceful and boys being perceived as more powerful in physical play (Nilges, 1998). Both teachers and students often argue that if the situation is set up for equality and there is still separation, then there must be an essential difference between
the groups. Examining the reasoning behind why individuals treat children differentially based on gender is crucial to understanding the moral implications of such behaviors, as some may believe that they are not acting in an unjust manner. Interventions to address discrimination must take into account the different ideologies of the participants in order to be effective.

There has been developmental psychology research implementing direct programs to teach children in predominantly middle-income and majority ethnicity schools about gender discrimination. Findings suggest that there may be a developmental pathway regarding children’s understanding of discrimination moving from interpersonal to systemic and institutional. For instance, research that examined children’s understanding of the U.S. presidential office showed that girls recognized there was gender discrimination present in this position but still did not think they could ever be the U.S. President, as many girls thought that out-group members (men) would not vote for a woman (Bigler, Arthur, Hughes, & Patterson, 2008). Research with early adolescents indicates that many may not believe that systematic discrimination continues to exist. Weisgram and Bigler (2007) found that a one-day intervention program focusing on gender discrimination within science fields resulted in their female participants’ acknowledgment of discrimination but did not change societal norms of “appropriate” occupations or increase girls’ interest in science as a career. Further, in a program teaching about gender discrimination experienced by historical female figures, girls were more interested in working to prevent discrimination but did not believe that they would endure such discrimination in their own occupational goals (Pahlke, Bigler, & Green, 2010). These studies indicate that interventions and programming geared to gender discrimination need to take into account young people’s reasoning about why gender differences in behaviors, activities, and roles exist.

The research reviewed in this chapter provides evidence that social cognitive development is related to children’s and adolescents’ understanding of and judgments regarding differential attitudes, expectations, and treatment of others based on gender and sexual orientation. That is, young people’s developing moral, conventional, and personal understanding relates in important ways to whether they judge differential treatment based on gender or sexual orientation as unfair and harmful or whether they view it as legitimate, acceptable, or even helpful. While the research described above provides evidence for this hypothesis, to date, very little research has systematically investigated associations between social cognitive development and children’s and adolescents’ discriminatory behaviors based on gender or sexual orientation. This is an important direction for future research in this area.

Related to this, the research presented above also highlights the importance of gendered expectations, gender norms, and gender stereotypes in differential attitudes and expectations related to both gender and sexual orientation. While there has been some research investigating young people’s understanding of gender norms as social conventions (Carter & Patterson 1982; Smetana, 1986), more work in this area is needed. In particular, research that investigates the development of gender norms and expectations and how these relate to children’s and adolescents’ judgments about discrimination based on both gender and sexual orientation is warranted. In reviewing the research, it is apparent that most of the developmental work on gender discrimination has been conducted with children and early adolescents, whereas research on sexual orientation discrimination has focused on
middle and older adolescents and young adults. Investigating how gendered expectations, norms, and conventions are associated with both of these types of discrimination will begin to help us better understand whether or not these types of discrimination have similar developmental origins, correlates, and pathways, or whether they are distinct types of social attitudes that interrelate in specific ways at specific points in development. For example, is gender discrimination a precursor to sexual orientation discrimination, or are these distinct constructs with distinct developmental pathways?

The research presented in this chapter also highlights the centrality of young people’s social experiences in the development of their social understanding of differential expectations and treatment based on gender or sexual orientation. Children and adolescents construct an understanding of their social worlds and develop their social knowledge about gender and sexual orientation through their social interactions and social experiences (Kohlberg, 1966; Turiel, 1983). If a young child experiences differential parental attitudes and expectations based on gender that limits them and privileges another (e.g., boys are allowed to date when they are 14, while girls are not allowed to date until 18), they may begin to construct an understanding of differential treatment based on gender as unfair, hurtful, or discriminatory (Okin, 1989). Conversely, another child in the family who benefits from the differential expectations may construct an understanding of this differential treatment as legitimate or even beneficial and justify this by making appeals to stereotypes (e.g., girls need to be protected from boys and therefore shouldn’t date when they are young). As such, young people’s social experiences within different groups and contexts are important factors in shaping their developing understanding of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. Further, because of the importance of social experience, it is critical that researchers move beyond using predominantly European American, middle-income samples and begin to more systematically investigate the ways that cultural markers such as ethnicity, race, class, geographic region, and religion relate to young people’s understanding of and reasoning about differential treatment based on gender, gender identity/expression, and/or sexual orientation.

It is also critical to further investigate the role that context plays in channeling and/or shaping individuals’ social knowledge regarding gender and sexuality discrimination. Social conventions and social norms arise out of the explicitly or implicitly agreed-upon rules and conventions within a given social group, social context, culture, or institution. As reported above, these rules, norms, and conventions contribute to shaping young people’s social interactions and social experiences within contexts such as the family, peer group, or school, which has implications for their developing understandings of gender and sexuality, as well as how they understand differential expectations or treatment based on these salient social categories.

Gender and sexual orientation are foundational elements of identity as well as salient social categories that inform and direct our expectations, attitudes, and behaviors toward others, as well as our interactions. In fact, differential attitudes toward and treatment of individuals based on gender and/or sexual orientation are quite common across the globe. In some instances, individuals judge this differential treatment as harmful, unfair, and unjust. In other instances, however, differential treatment based on gender and/or sexual orientation is condoned, legitimized, and promoted. As is evidenced from the review of literature above, individuals’ attitudes and beliefs, their reasoning about different types of
social interactions, as well as contextually based social and cultural norms regarding gender and sexuality all factor into how individuals make sense of the fair treatment of others.

References


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So what is fairness? . . . Central to it must be a demand to avoid bias in our evaluations, taking note of the interests and concerns of others as well, and in particular to need to avoid being influenced by our respective vested interests, or by our personal priorities or eccentricities or prejudices. It can broadly be seen as a demand for impartiality.

(Sen, 2009, p. 54)

Discriminatory practices prevent society from making use of the contributions of all individuals.

(Graves, 2001, p. 10)

**Introduction**

Morality emerges early in childhood. As has been well documented, other social cognitive competencies also develop in early childhood, including an awareness of social groups, categorization of individuals by group membership, and a sense of one’s own identity (Killen & Rutland, 2011). Further, children develop psychological knowledge about intentionality and the mental states of others, which bears on their moral judgments (Decety & Howard, this volume; Lagattuta & Weller, this volume; Mulvey, Hitti, & Killen, 2013). The focus of this chapter is on how the emergence of morality along with other social cognitive developments bear on the emergence of prejudicial attitudes, biases, and forms of discrimination in development.

Given that morality develops early, it might be expected that young children would not display prejudicial attitudes toward others based on categories such as gender, race, and ethnicity. After all, morality refers to principles about how to treat others with respect to equality, fairness, and justice. If young children hold a value that everyone should be treated equally then we would expect that children would not display unequal treatment in the form of exclusion, for example. Yet empirical research, as well as anecdotal observations, has shown that children’s reactions to others, social exclusion decisions, and in-group preferences reflect varying degrees of bias and prejudice based on gender, race,
ethnicity, and cultural membership. What makes this possible when evidence demonstrates that children care and reason about equality and fairness?

We draw from current research on the development of social identity as well as research on the psychological understanding of the intentions of others to provide an explanation for this conflict. Rather than view morality as a conflict of being “selfish” versus “moral” (which we—and others—have argued is a false dichotomy; see Turiel, 1983), we will argue that the application of moral principles to everyday social interactions is complex, requiring judgments about groups, social relationships, and mental states of others.

Social psychological research on groups has demonstrated that group identity has a normative aspect to it. In addition, social psychological research has also provided extensive evidence for the way that categorization and group identity, as part of human development, contributes to the manifestation of prejudice in adulthood (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). For over 50 years, in fact, social psychological theories about prejudice in adulthood have demonstrated that prejudicial attitudes are reflective of social attitudes, group processes, group norms, and social identity (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005). This approach does not ignore the extreme conditions of social exclusion that occur in adulthood such as genocide and acts of terrorism (Opotow, 1990; Staub, 1990). Understanding the everyday events that reflect social exclusion based on group membership, however, requires information about the basic social and cognitive processes associated with becoming a member of a group (Nesdale, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). We argue that these processes begin in childhood, and we review this literature from the lens of moral developmental theories.

Social groups perpetuate attitudes, often in the form of biases and stereotypes, in order to maintain hierarchies, power, and status. Allport (1954) theorized that attitudes about the out-group were an outcome of the desire to enhance the in-group that resulted in negative attitudes about the out-group. Extensive research has shown that positive contact with the out-group, particularly in the form of cross-group friendships, helps to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tropp & Prenovost, 2008). Intergroup attitude research with adults has focused on the factors related to egalitarian attitudes, without examining the developmental origins.

Developmental research over the past 15 years has examined the connections between group identity and moral judgment (as well as affect) to understand the origins of prejudice. This has been part of a larger area of research on developmental intergroup attitudes, which has investigated the origins of stereotyping, discrimination, and bias (Dunham & Degner, 2010; Killen & McKown, 2005; Levy & Killen, 2008; Quintana & McKown, 2008; Rutland, Abrams, & Levy, 2007). The central focus of research designed to address the question that began this chapter is: How is it that children who hold moral values also act in ways that violate the underlying principles of these values, particularly with respect to prejudice and discrimination?

Prejudging others, holding biases, and discriminating based on group membership, as well as rejecting prejudice, suppressing biases, and compensating for discriminating through affirmative action (and other means), involve judgments about morality, the group, and psychological attitudes about others. Social cognitive development emerges out of children’s interactions with peers, particularly in social groups, and from adult–child relationships. These sources of experience are relevant to the emergence of prejudice, as peer groups can perpetuate or reduce bias, and adults, particularly parents and teachers, can also
contribute to or discourage discriminatory acts and stereotypic expectations. Following our review of the theoretical bases for understanding how morality is manifested in intergroup contexts, we will identify the peer and adult–child sources of influence regarding the emergence of prejudice in childhood. To address this complex issue, we will describe how foundational theorists in moral development addressed (and failed to address) the issue of prejudice and bias. We will then describe the current conceptual frameworks that have been drawn on to investigate and document morality in the context of intergroup attitudes, as well as new research and future directions.

Theoretical Framework

Morality is at the core of what it means to be social. The acquisition of moral principles about fairness and justice is a fundamental aspect of human development that has been studied by developmental, social, cognitive, and comparative psychologists, as well as experimental philosophers and behavioral economists. Drawing on philosophical theories (Nussbaum, 1999; Rawls, 1971), morality has been defined by developmental psychologists as principles for how individuals should treat one another with respect to another's welfare, fairness, justice, and rights. Piaget's (1932) seminal book on the moral judgment of the child remains one of the most cited sources for the origins of developmental theory about morality.

Piaget (1932) incorporated philosophical definitions of morality into his psychological inquiry of the origins of moral thinking. He demonstrated that children develop a morality independent of authority expectations by illustrating their ability to critique adult mandates that violate moral norms about fairness or equality. Morality is not defined by the group or by adults but exists as a set of independent principles by which to judge and evaluate social actions and events. Piaget (1932) argued that moral norms, if they exist, must be independent from group norms. This is because many societal norms are incompatible with notions of fairness, justice, and equality. For example, societal norms about unilateral power relationships and hierarchies are often in conflict with theories about fairness, equal treatment, and justice, which Piaget (1932) articulated when analyzing the child’s world of rules and regulations. In his theory, societal norms refer to broad ideologies held by a nation, or specific norms held by a child’s peer group.

When does the child understand that individuals in positions of power, such as authority figures, do not always act in a way consistent with moral principles? This is a complex question, one that addresses the distinction between moral norms and societal ones. Forming the ability to critically evaluate societal norms involves recognizing, in part, that individuals in positions of authority, power, and status are capable of creating rules that are wrong from a moral viewpoint, that is, rules that are unfair or unjust. Piaget argued that it was not until 7 or 8 years of age that children became capable of evaluating rules, social interactions, and social exchanges on the basis of a set of principles about fairness and rights. Prior to this age, children defined moral rules as what adults espoused.

Thus, a crucial aspect of Piaget's (1932) theory is that for Piaget, morality develops out of an authority orientation (see Turiel, 1983, for an expansion of this viewpoint). Yet individuals in positions of authority have often been those who have perpetuated stereotypic expectations, constituted structures of discrimination, and propagated prejudicial attitudes. This is true throughout history and true in the child’s world as well. Unfair treatment
sanctioned by authority figures includes instances when teachers use rules that are perceived as unfair by children, such as punishing a class for the misbehavior of one child. Even more damaging, perhaps, are the findings revealing that teachers often unknowingly hold stereotypic beliefs, disadvantaging students (Steele, 1997). Further, parents sometimes show preferential treatment based on gender, such as granting more autonomy to sons than to daughters (Killen, Park, Lee-Kim, & Shin, 2005). This raises several questions, including: Does morality grow out of respect for authority? And if so, how is the child's developmental trajectory reconciled with the fact that authority expectations are not always based on fairness or justice (Helwig, 2008)?

Close examinations of Piaget's data and more direct testing of his hypotheses, however, have indicated that young children do evaluate adult mandates to carry out a task beyond their jurisdiction as unfair (Damon, 1977; Helwig, 1998; Turiel, 1983). Kohlberg (1969) recognized this problematic aspect of Piaget's proposition and thus diminished the role of authority in his view of early development. Instead, Kohlberg (1969) characterized early moral thinking as the confusion between selfish perspectives and moral ones. He argued that young children reasoned that one should obey moral rules to avoid punishment (or to gain pleasurable outcomes). Not until adolescence do individuals focus on groups (acting to conform to group rules), and only by late adolescence (and rarely, if at all) do individuals consider the viewpoint of humankind with an understanding about justice and fairness.

Kohlberg's approach was also shown to be a limited characterization because findings demonstrated that children viewed moral transgressions as wrong even in the absence of rules and punishment (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2008). Moreover, conceptual analyses of Piaget's and Kohlberg's stimuli for testing their hypotheses (e.g., vignettes designed to test competing hypotheses about moral judgment) revealed that there were often confounds in the design that warranted empirical scrutiny and new investigations.

Overall, Piaget's theoretical formulations, empirical findings, and methodologies have been improved, updated, and revised extensively over the past decades. Yet his approach to moral judgment remains foundational and generative. As evidence, his theories and empirical studies launched extensive research programs in developmental psychology, providing new findings about the origins of morality and changes across the lifespan.

While Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1969) addressed the importance of defining morality from the perspective of challenging cultural and societal norms, neither theory empirically studied the tension between moral principles about justice and the lack of fair and just treatment that results from prejudicial attitudes (Kohlberg, 1969). This tension results when individuals have to apply moral principles to others who represent different social status as well as those who reflect an “out-group” identity (for a review, see Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006).

Piaget's (1932) and particularly Kohlberg's (1969) research on moral judgment has implications for judgments that reflect a challenge to the norms of the group. Yet only Kohlberg's theory provided examples that directly bear on contesting prejudice, as with his reference to the civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Ghandi, who both advocated nonviolence protest for promoting human justice, as exemplars of the highest stage in his system of moral judgment. Even so, Kohlberg's (1969) theory did not provide a means for revealing whether children or adolescents display bias or how they evaluate prejudicial behavior of others. This is because they relied on complex,
predesigned vignettes (such as the Heinz dilemma in which a man steals a drug to save his wife’s life) to measure morality across the lifespan.

In the past decade, moral developmental researchers have addressed the question of prejudice by drawing on social identity theory, and specifically developmental research on social identity conducted by developmental–social psychologists (Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Ferrell, 2007; Nesdale, 2001; Nesdale, et al., 2010; Verkuyten & De Wolf, 2007). Recent studies on prejudicial attitudes in childhood have demonstrated the complexity of children’s viewpoints about bias and discrimination (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Rutland, Killen, & Abrams, 2010), using a range of theories drawing from both the cognitive–developmental models of Piaget and Kohlberg, as well as developmental variants of social identity theory.

**Social Domain Theory**

Social domain theory provides a theoretical framework for investigating the emergence of prejudice, social exclusion, discrimination, and bias. The theory identifies three domains of knowledge: the **moral domain**, which involves issues of fairness, justice, rights and welfare; the **societal domain**, which is concerned with conventions, customs and traditions; and the **psychological domain**, which includes issues of personal choice and individual discretion (Nucci & Turiel, 2000; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2008). These categories were derived from the foundational work of Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1969) with a fundamental difference regarding the theory about emergence. Rather than postulating that the young child focuses on the self (selfish desires) and then groups (conformity to rules) and finally morality (justice), Turiel (1983, 2008) argued that the self, groups, and morality reflect three distinct domains of knowledge that coexist.

Research using this model has demonstrated that children’s moral knowledge is differentiated from other areas of social knowledge, such as knowledge about groups (authority, conventions, and regulations), the societal domain, and knowledge about the personal (individual prerogatives and personal decision making), which is part of the psychological domain. While there have been many debates about the cultural variation, assessment methodologies, and the age of acquisition of moral reasoning (see Miller & Bland, this volume; Shweder, Miller, & Mahaptra, 1987), most researchers from different theoretical orientations have agreed that morality reflects concepts of justice, others’ welfare, and fairness. However, only in the past decade has the model been applied to the topic of prejudice and intergroup attitudes.

Traditional social domain theory utilized a methodology involving interviews and observations of children’s peer and adult–child interactions (see Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, this volume). Children were asked to evaluate prototypical rule transgressions along multiple dimensions to determine the underlying criteria associated with their evaluations as well as the form of reasoning. The results have demonstrated that children as young as 3–4 years of age use different criteria for evaluating acts that causes harm, for example, from acts that violate a conventional school rule. In other words, assessing what children viewed as nonmoral social events provided insight into the types of exchanges that were conceptualized as moral, confirming that children distinguish between different kinds of acts using epistemological criteria drawn from philosophical theories. Generally, the research findings revealed that individuals conceptualize moral rules as generalizable (any act that involves
harming a victim is wrong), unalterable (the rule cannot be changed), nonrule contingent (acts that cause harm to victims are still wrong even if there is no rule), and not a matter of authority jurisdiction (even if the teacher says that it’s okay, it’s still wrong). In contrast, individuals view societal rules as context-specific, alterable, rule contingent, and under authority jurisdiction.

These criteria apply to moral acts such as physical harm, psychological harm, unfair distribution, or allocation of resources. Acts identified as within the societal domain included customs, conventions, traditions, and regulations for ensuring the smooth functioning of group interactions. The third domain, the psychological, has referred to matters that are not regulated and are viewed as up to individuals to decide, such as what activities to engage in (e.g., leisure time activities), what type of dress (what to wear), and whom to choose as a friend. Criteria associated with the personal domain included individual prerogatives and personal choice. Research has demonstrated that individuals across the lifespan view some issues as neither moral nor societal but about personal choice (Nucci, 1981, and in this volume). Moreover, the findings have been generalized to different cultural contexts and across the lifespan, indicating that individuals draw on different domains of social knowledge to interpret social events and interactions.

Extensions of Social Domain Theory to Address Complex Issues

The original research on social domain theory used prototypic social events to demonstrate the categorical distinctions reflective of the three domains. Over the past 2 decades, however, research has applied the social domain model to complex and multifaceted issues, such as emotionally laden situations, parent–adolescent conflict, culture, civil liberties, rights, social exclusion, and prejudice (see Arsenio, this volume; Helwig, Ruck, & Peterson-Badali, this volume; Horn & Sinno, this volume; Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, this volume; Turiel, this volume; Wainryb & Recchia, this volume). Whether individuals use one category or multiple categories to evaluate a social event or interaction has been a central aspect of the research methodology. Young children often use one category to evaluate prototypic issues (e.g., evaluating hitting someone for no reason using moral justifications). More complex issues, however, invoke multiple categories, even in early childhood. For example, when one child cuts in line to use the swings, two concepts may be invoked: the fairness status of turn taking (OK or not OK to not let someone else have their turn when cutting in line?) and the conventional rule about how to use the swing (OK or not OK to create a line for determining who gets to use the swing?); in these cases, the research question pertains to the use of multiple reasons, and the priority given to these reasons, when evaluating complex events.

Extending Social Domain Theory to Examine Prejudice

Research conducted on multifaceted situations involving social exclusion based on group membership, such as gender, race, and ethnicity, revealed that children used different forms and adolescents used moral reasons such as the wrongfulness of discrimination and prejudice, which go beyond a focus solely on “unfairness.” For the societal domain, children often used group functioning and group identity to justify exclusion, as distinct from a
strict focus on customs or conventions. In addition, psychological reasoning extended beyond personal choice to focus on the attributions of intentions, knowledge about mental states (theory of mind), and expectations about what others would do in an exclusion context (see Richardson, Mulvey, & Killen, 2012). Investigating the types of social and moral reasoning that children apply to prejudice requires a theory and method for assessing prejudice in childhood.

Morality, Prejudice, and Intergroup Attitudes

Stereotypes, prejudice, and bias emerge in childhood in different contexts, including the home, school, and neighborhood. The consequences for recipients of bias are often social exclusion and rejection, leading to anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal, as well as motivational problems in school contexts and contributing as a negative risk factor for academic achievement (Graham, 2006; Killen, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013). Aboud (1988) conducted a set of studies in the early 1980s on prejudice among children, leading to new lines of research integrating social psychological and developmental theories to understand prejudice (Dunham & Degner, 2010; Levy & Killen, 2008; Quintana & McKown, 2008). Research on the target of prejudice, group identity, group dynamics, and moral judgment has reflected systematic lines of inquiry regarding understanding the origins of prejudice.

Generally, developmental psychologists define prejudice as negative attitudes toward others based on group membership, stereotypes as traits or interests attributed to individuals based solely on group membership with little recognition of intragroup variation, and discrimination as acts of bias based on group membership. A large body of research on children’s prejudice has examined many facets of the emergence of prejudice, including stereotyping (Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006), prejudicial attitudes (Raabe & Beelman, 2011), discrimination (Brown & Bigler, 2005), implicit bias (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005), categorization (Bigler & Liben, 2006), group identity (Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffths, 2004), and social exclusion (Hitti, Mulvey, & Killen, 2011; Horn, 2008; Killen & Rutland, 2011). Overall, measures have focused on the complexity of prejudicial attitudes in the past decade by examining group dynamics, in-group bias as distinct from out-group threat, social exclusion, and discrimination. For this chapter, we focus primarily on social exclusion from a moral developmental perspective, but see the references above for other aspects of prejudice in childhood.

Drawing on social domain theory, a new and burgeoning line of research has systematically investigated the role of moral judgments in the context of intergroup attitudes (Abrams, Rutland, Ferrell, & Pelletier, 2008; Crystal, Killen, & Ruck, 2008; Gieling, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2010; Horn, 2008; Killen, Henning, Kelly, Crystal, & Ruck, 2007; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2012). This approach has found that children and adolescents use different forms of reasoning when evaluating social exclusion, intolerance, and rejection based on group membership; this has revealed new findings about the processes that both hinder and perpetuate prejudicial attitudes.

It is necessary, though, to further investigate the contexts that invoke different forms of reasoning by children. For example, in contexts in which fairness issues compete with social–conventional considerations such as group functioning, it is unclear when children will give priority to moral concerns over group functioning. We do not know what level
of salience of an issue tips the balance and results in giving priority not to morality but to ensuring that a group works well (at the expense of fairness), what it is about groups that lead children to justify exclusion, and how group identity evolves. Moreover, there are many new questions about how children’s psychological knowledge bears on their moral judgments, and particularly in intergroup contexts, these have only recently received attention in the psychological literature.

To address these issues, developmental intergroup research over the past decade has focused on conflicts that exist between moral principles (e.g., fairness) and group considerations (such as group influence, in-group bias, and out-group negativity) (Killen, Hitti, & Mulvey, 2013). Even more recently, there has been research on conflicts between moral judgments (e.g., fairness) and psychological attributions of others (e.g., theory of mind), which provides a new set of contributions for understanding the social cognitive bases of prejudicial or biased attitudes about others in childhood (Mulvey, et al., 2013; Lagattuta & Weller, this volume). This juxtaposition has led to the recognition that conceptualizations about prejudice are multifaceted and that investigating prejudice requires a multidimensional framework, particularly from a developmental point of view.

In the subsequent sections, we describe research findings on the role of peer groups and peer relationships, followed by findings on parental influences and socialization. We bring a social cognitive developmental framework to these sections by demonstrating how moral, conventional, and psychological considerations are relevant in interpreting children’s attitudes and behavior in intergroup contexts.

**Peer Interactions and Peer Groups**

Theory and research has demonstrated that peer interactions are important for facilitating change in moral development. Through reciprocal negotiations with peers, children acquire skills such as bargaining and compromising, and develop an understanding of others. What is the role of peer interactions regarding children’s developing understanding that prejudice and discrimination is wrong? Research investigations have been organized to study the negative and positive roles that peer relationships play. First, one body of literature has examined how peer interactions contribute to prejudicial attitudes, as when the in-group identity creates out-group dislike. Second, research has shown the contexts in which peer interactions help to reduce prejudice, as when cross-race friendships foster empathy, perspective taking, and a position to challenge stereotypic expectations. We focus on two areas of moral decision making, to illustrate the role of intergroup attitudes on moral judgments: allocation of resources (dividing up resources among a group of individuals with different claims to the resource) and social exclusion based on group membership (excluding someone from participation in a group due to their race or ethnicity).

**Allocation of Resources**

Philosophical and psychological theories have long identified allocation of resources as a central moral issue for any group or community (Rawls, 1971). Children’s judgments about the fair allocation of resources are central to moral development, and findings have indicated that these judgments emerge in early childhood. Piaget (1932) examined both
retributive and distributive justice. Damon (1977) followed Piaget’s studies on distributive justice by investigating children’s reasons for dividing up a resource in the context of egalitarian versus meritorious claims. Egalitarian modes were those in which everyone receives an equal share, whereas meritorious modes were those in which merit (effort, talent) is taken into account as a fair model of distribution. For example, children deciding how a peer group should divide up resources (money) acquired from a paper route could consider these two types of claims. Importantly, Damon (1977) analyzed children’s reasoning and explanations for their allocation decisions.

When do children distinguish group norms from group identity, and how does this enter into decision making about resource allocation? Answering this question requires considering the group components of resource allocation decisions. First, there is the group membership of the claimants requesting their share of resources, and second, there is the group norm held by the group regarding who is entitled to a share of those resources. Researchers in developmental psychology, as well as behavioral economics and cognitive and social psychology, have recently conducted studies on children’s allocation of resource decisions (Blake & Rand, 2009; Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008). Many of these current studies have been behavioral, focusing on children’s allocation decisions rather than their moral reasoning about the basis for their decision.

Researchers have also included an intergroup context by using a minimal group paradigm in which the identification of the group is based on a single feature such as the color of their shirt (the red shirt group versus the green shirt group), and children are asked to allocate on the basis of this single criterion. In some contexts, children distribute resources unequally, based on individual gain or benefitting in-group members more than out-group members (Dunham, Baron, & Carey, 2011), but in other contexts, children are egalitarians, dividing resources equally (Warneken, Lohse, Melis, & Tomasello, 2011). Children’s preference for fair allocation to in-group members has been observed in older children and adolescents’ in-group decision making (Gummerum, Keller, Takezawa, & Mata, 2008). These mixed findings, demonstrating that children both benefit the self or in-group members more than out-group members and are also egalitarian, suggests that other variables (or sets of variables) are required to explain the role of in-group and out-group membership in allocation of resource decisions.

Abrams and Rutland (2008), along with Nesdale (2004), have proposed that group membership is a significant factor and requires direct analysis. Using variants of social identity theory, they measure how much a child identifies with the in-group or out-group and the criteria that underlie this identification. For example, when asked to divide up a resource between the red-shirt group and the green-shirt group, it is necessary to know whether and how much the participant identifies with either group. Moreover, Abrams and Rutland (2008) argue that group identity is often defined by group norms, not strictly by group membership. Group norms are the expectations, beliefs, and values held by one’s group. In contrast, group membership is the identifying feature that characterizes the group (such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, culture). In a series of studies with 6- to 11-year olds, Abrams and Rutland (2008) demonstrated that by 8 years of age, children differentiated the group norm from group membership. Children view loyalty to the group as a matter of norms, not just membership. If you belong to a group, for example, and an in-group member violates the norms, then exclusion would be justified.
if the norm was the basis for identity. However, if membership is the basis, then children do not view exclusion as legitimate.

From their viewpoint, differentiating group norms from group membership is important for understanding the role of group identity on decisions (Abrams & Rutland, 2008). Intragroup dynamics refers to judgments about in-group members who enhance group identity by upholding group norms in comparison to in-group members who do not (and deviate from the group norms). In contrast, intergroup dynamics refers to judgments about exclusion (or inclusion) of out-group members who threaten (or enhance) group identity. The importance of these comparisons lies in determining the conditions in which in-group bias or out-group negativity is manifested. Social identity theory predicts that in-group preference or bias results in out-group negativity (prejudice). However, subjective group dynamics reveals that the relationship between in-group bias and out-group negativity depends on the norm.

Do children view it as legitimate to exclude an in-group member who violates a moral norm of the group? What if the group has a norm that violates moral values? Then would exclusion of an in-group member who espouses a positive norm be desirable? To test whether children and adolescents take group membership and group norms into account, children and adolescents evaluated peer groups with equal and unequal allocation norms (Killen, Rutland, Abrams, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013). Children at 9 and 13 years of age viewed a norm about equal allocation of resources to be more important than preserving group membership (defined by gender). When asked to decide between including an in-group member who rejected equal allocation and an out-group member who supported equality, the majority of participants chose the out-group member. Most participants also stated that it would be wrong to exclude the in-group member who deviates from the norm, citing unfairness as well as group functioning. Yet, 9-year olds viewed it as all right to exclude the in-group member who wanted to give more money to the in-group than to the out-group because it would not be fair.

In this study, reasoning about allocation decisions, along with an experimental design that focused on group identification (an actual group, gender, along with a group identity assessment) provided new information regarding children’s orientations to allocations, especially in an intergroup context. Studies have often described children as either acting to preserve equal allocation or acting out of in-group preference. By embedding an allocation decision in the context of group dynamics, this study was able to determine what children think when both concerns are within the same task; the result was that equal allocation was more important, but group loyalty was not ignored.

With age, adolescents used two forms of reasoning, citing unfairness for wanting more resources for the in-group, as well as group functioning for doing something that would monetarily benefit the group. In the next section, we will review research on social exclusion based on group membership.

**Social Exclusion: Morality and Prejudice**

The developmental intergroup perspective on social exclusion involves understanding when exclusion is viewed as legitimate or wrong based on group membership, as described above. In one study, for example, three types of exclusion scenarios were presented
to participants for their evaluation: friendship (exclusion of a friend due to gender or race), peer (exclusion of a peer from a music club due to gender or race), and school (exclusion from attending school due to gender or race) (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). Judgment criteria included generalizability (would exclusion be wrong in a different culture?), authority jurisdiction (what if parents said it was OK to exclude?), as well as peer influence (what if a peer said it was OK to exclude?).

The vast majority of participants viewed exclusion from school based on gender or race as wrong but exclusion from a club as less wrong, and friendship exclusion as more legitimate. The reasons for the peer and friendship forms of exclusion reflected a mixture of moral and other categories: For the peer club, reasons based on group functioning were used to justify exclusion; for friendship, reasons based on personal choice were given to justify exclusion. Thus, evaluations of social exclusion invoked different interpretations; not all forms of intergroup exclusion were viewed as wrong in the same way that an act of physical harm is viewed as wrong from a very early age (Smetana, 1985). Other studies on exclusion based on race have shown that children view it as wrong and unfair, but ethnic minority adolescents view it as more wrong than do ethnic majority adolescents (Crystal, et al., 2008).

This approach to understanding social exclusion in childhood is different from one that is focused on personality traits and individual differences such as in the peer rejection literature (Bierman, 2004; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Peer rejection typically is explained in terms of children who lack social skills and are identified as extremely shy and fearful (and who become victims), and children who are extremely aggressive (and become bullies). For these contexts, the moral dimension of rejection has to do with the physical and psychological harm that is inflicted on a victim, which the vast majority of children view as wrong and unfair. An equally important and different level of conceptual analysis to explain peer rejection stems from the intergroup social exclusion framework (for a review, see Killen, Mulvey, et al., 2013). The factors that contribute to children’s use of nonmoral reasons have to do with the assumptions about group identity, as well as the attribution of intentions of excluders as members of groups.

Social cognitive judgments and attitudes, along with societal structures and expectations, also provide the basis for social exclusion. There are times when personality traits are unrelated to the basis for exclusion. In these contexts, the source of exclusion is prejudicial attitudes rather than behavior by the victim that invites exclusion.

**Negative Consequences of Intergroup Exclusion**

The negative consequences of exclusion based on ethnicity have been demonstrated in many studies. Graham and colleagues (2009) examined peer victimization among early adolescents and the role of classroom ethnic diversity on adjustment outcomes (Graham, Bellmore, Nishina, & Juvonen, 2009). Participants were Latino/a and African American and were recruited from middle schools in which the numeric status of students by classroom was varied (a key aspect that has not been studied extensively but contributes to exclusion experiences). In their study, students were either members of the numerical majority ethnic group, the numerical minority, or one of several ethnic groups in ethnically diverse schools. Ethnic minority students experienced more exclusion and social
stress when they were the numeric minority. Overall these authors proposed that it is important to include school- and classroom-level ethnic diversity as a context variable when conducting studies on peer victimization during adolescence.

The consequences of experiencing exclusion based on culture membership can also be detrimental. Extensive research in the United States with recently immigrated students of Asian and Latin descent has shown the consequences of experiencing exclusion as well as victimization. Among a sample of Asian American and Latin American adolescents, Huynh and Fuligni (2010) examined the frequency of peer and adult daily discrimination and experiences of exclusion and whether discrimination predicted their well-being. Reports of discrimination varied by group such that adolescents from Latin American and Asian backgrounds reported more adult and peer discrimination than did their European American peers (Huynh & Fuligni, 2008). Additionally, Latin American youth reported more adult discrimination than their Asian peers. Overall, frequency of discrimination predicted lower grade point averages, lower self-esteem, and more depressive symptoms, distress, and even physical complaints. Clearly, the role of teachers and classroom climate are central to the way children and adolescents experience social exclusion.

Social Exclusion and Social Experience: Peers and Authority Figures

Møller and Tenenbaum (2011) examined majority (Danish) children’s reasoning about peer and teacher statements regarding exclusion stemming from increasing overt discrimination against Muslims in Denmark. Children were presented with vignettes about peer and teacher exclusion based on gender and ethnicity (for example: “Shahar wants to play Ludo, but the teacher says that she cannot play because there are already three Danish boys and girls playing. Instead, the teacher says that a Danish classmate can play”). Context changes in reasoning were expected by age, school, type of exclusion (ethnic or gender-based) and perpetrator (peer versus teacher). Majority children found it less acceptable for a teacher to exclude a child protagonist than a peer-to-peer instance of exclusion. Overall, children were sensitive to the role of authority in moral transgressions, as well as group status, judging it less acceptable to exclude a less powerful group member. Children and adolescents are critical of teachers who treat students differently because of their group membership such as culture and religion. At the same time, the legitimacy of peer exclusion based on cultural membership raises concerns about the existence of underlying biases.

Verkuyten and Thijis (2002) addressed these variables by examining how social exclusion amongst Dutch, Turkish Dutch, Moroccan Dutch, and Surinamese Dutch preadolescents related to school (de)segregation and multicultural education (Verkuyten & Thijis, 2002). They surveyed 10- to 12-year olds from 178 classrooms in 82 elementary schools across the Netherlands. A multilevel analysis showed that personal experience and perceptions of ethnic name calling, teasing, and exclusion in the playground were determined independently by classroom settings and structure. In particular, children experienced less exclusion if they believed they could tell the teachers about unfair behavior toward them and that the teacher would take action. This is a significant demonstration of how children who have recourse to report on the unfairness of exclusion were less likely to be victimized.

Dutch children also reported more awareness of ethnic exclusion if they said their classes spent more time discussing multicultural issues (e.g., the need to be fair to others from
different countries and recognize different cultures within the class and society). Other
studies have also shown that 10- to 13-year-old Dutch and Turkish Dutch children report-
ing higher levels of multicultural education in the classroom showed less ethnic intergroup bias (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001). Findings from Verkuyten and colleagues’ research also indicate that youth are aware of the role of power between victim and perpetrator. Here, transgressions’ wrongfulness varied when the perpetrator was from the majority status group and the victim was from the minority status group. When the perpetrator is from the majority status group, exclusion reflects societal-level patterns and the asymmetrical power balance, in contrast to when the perpetrator is from the minority status group (Verkuyten, 2011). This research has focused on how teachers as authority members in the school context can help to reduce the experiences of prejudice.

Parental Influences and Racial Socialization

How do parental discourse and messages (both direct and indirect) about society and status inform children about the wrongfulness of prejudice? Peer relationships (group identity as well as peer pressure) and parental discourse about intergroup relationships can contribute to the acquisition and maintenance of prejudicial attitudes as well as egalitarian notions of social groups. Very little of the research on morality in the context of intergroup relationships has addressed the critical role that parents play (for an exception, see Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Verkuyten, 2011).

Research on racial socialization (Hughes et al., 2006), however, has examined what ethnic minority parents do to prepare their children for the world of potential discrimination as well as for diversity, while other studies in this area have demonstrated that parents often convey negative messages about cross-race friendships, dating, and marriage. Yet research on racial socialization has identified a parental socialization paradox. While ethnic minority parents send messages of egalitarianism to their children, they are also preparing their children for a world of bias and discrimination, that is, a world in which individuals are not acting in an egalitarian manner. Ethnic minority parents have the difficult task of communicating the importance of egalitarianism coupled with preparing children, and explaining why it might be that the larger societal context is not consistently acting in accordance with those same moral principles. For example, when parents teach that everyone should treat others with fairness and equality and then indicate that some individuals do not do so, the natural question is, “Why not?” This response requires an explanation of the history of groups and patterns of unfair treatment and explanations about the power of groups, hierarchies, and status. Thus, this discussion potentially reflects an array of social cognitive concepts including morality, society, and psychological knowledge (such as the intentions of others and the lack of information about connections between acts and consequences).

Most of the developmental intergroup research has focused on how majority group individuals (e.g., those high in status based on gender, race, or ethnicity) perpetuate exclusion, in-group favoritism, prejudice, bullying, and racial and ethnic discrimination. The rationale for this focus has been to determine how to reduce bias among majority groups in order to treat individuals from minority groups in a fair and just manner. In contrast, research on racial/ethnic socialization and identity development typically highlights how
ethnic minority parents prepare their children for experiences related to bias and discrimination; the goal is to provide a buffer for creating and developing resiliency and adaptive strategies for combating prejudice (Lane, Wellman, Olson, LaBounty, & Kerr, 2010). In these lines of research, “majority” and “minority” indicate dimensions of power, distinguishing socially privileged from disenfranchised groups.

This research has not drawn from intergroup attitudes research, which is heavily based on social psychological theory, because the goal is more focused on socialization practices and parenting. Yet these lines of research are complementary, designed to reduce prejudice and bias as well as to enhance prosocial inclusive attitudes of individuals from different backgrounds.

**Parental Communication About Discrimination**

Racial and ethnic parental socialization can act as a protective factor for racial minority youth, promoting resilience in the context of social exclusion and victimization (Neblett, Terzian, & Harriott, 2010; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). To investigate how parental messages for ethnic minority children’s development bear on their healthy social adjustment (such as resiliency to depressive symptomology), Neblett, White, Ford, Philip, Nguyên, and Sellers (2008) conducted a longitudinal study among African American adolescents. Parental egalitarian messages were examined (messages that encourage adolescents not to use race in determining how they will interact with other people such as, “All people are equal regardless of their race”). These researchers also examined psychological adjustment in the context of racial discrimination among African American adolescents. Adolescents who reported receiving more egalitarian messages from their primary caregivers had a more positive group identity, which led to more healthy psychological adjustment.

In addition to these gains, racial socialization has also been found to act as a mechanism to reduce stress and even reduce the risk of substance use among African American youth (Neblett, Terzian, & Harriott, 2010). While findings from these studies are critical to enhancing research in social, moral, and racial identity development, these studies and others commonly use children’s and adolescents’ self-reports about parental messages, indicating how children and adolescents have perceived and internalized parental messages. Another key question, however, is how might parents themselves evaluate messages they send to their children? Further, what other mechanisms are in play as parents communicate to children about ethnicity, bias, and justice?

White-Johnson, Ford, and Sellers (2010) examined parenting messages in a sample of African American mothers. These researchers found three patterns of racial socialization experiences among mothers: multifaceted (discussing racial identity), low race salience (not referring to race), and unengaged (little parent–child interaction). The multifaceted socialization pattern was correlated with mothers’ own experience with discrimination and their frequency in openly talking about race with children. The results of this pattern were that parental racial socialization messages reflecting pride and knowledge about African American culture were positively associated with Black youths’ peer self-esteem. Thus, racial socialization in the context of ethnic minority parents and children presents a positive case for children’s identity development.
What about parental socialization among racial and ethnic majority families? Hughes (2003) has argued that European American parents, for example, rarely engage in explicit racial socialization. Whereas African American parents frequently address race and racism with their children, beginning in middle school, many European American parents have a colorblind philosophy that holds that the mention of race creates negative racial attitudes. It may be that European American parents assume that their children do not “see” race and that to discuss it would be to create the problem (Pahlke et al., 2012). In fact, a recent study found that when primed with a colorblind mindset, European American children were less likely to reference intergroup differences between individuals, and were less likely to view scenarios of explicit peer, race-based bias as being instances of racial discrimination, than were students primed to recognize and appreciate differences (Apfelbaum, Pauker, Ambady, Sommers, & Norton, 2008). Additionally, it was found that 10- and 11-year-old children performed more poorly than 8- and 9-year-old children because they failed to label individuals’ race.

This strong age affect suggests that as early as 10 years old, European American children appear to view acknowledging race as violating social conventions (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). Thus, this colorblind lens can be detrimental to projects of equity and justice, as children raised in this context witnessing instances of race-based bullying, as an example, would perceive it as a typical playground transgression among schoolmates, looking at it devoid of the racial context. Thus, the moral valence of the act and perhaps children’s likelihood to intervene would vary based on these interpretations as well.

For younger children, Pahlke, Bigler, and Suizzo (2012) found that European American parents took a colorblind approach when reading stories for preschool-aged children that were designed to provide opportunities for direct discussions about race (e.g., a story about a zebra who had black and white stripes), despite the fact that the majority of children in the study displayed racial bias in a separate test conducted prior to the investigation of storybook reading strategies. Among older adolescents, Hughes and Bigler (2011) examined the factors associated with African American and European American adolescents’ views of race-conscious social policies. They found that African American adolescents supported race-conscious social policies more than their European American peers (Hughes & Bigler, 2011).

Parental Messages About Cross-Group Relationships

Extensive evidence has demonstrated that cross-group friendships contribute positively to a reduction in prejudice as well as an increase in moral reasoning about intergroup exclusion. Yet cross-group friendships also significantly decline with age from childhood to adolescence (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987; McGlothlin, Edmonds, & Killen, 2007). Researchers have hypothesized that the decline is related to parental expectations about the implications of cross-race dating, which increases parental anxiety about contact with members of out-groups as well as societal messages about interracial relationships (Kennedy, 2003). Research on parental attitudes toward cross-race dating have indicated that adolescents are reluctant to reveal their cross-race dating partners to their parents for fear of negative reactions from parents (Edmonds & Killen, 2009; Miller, Olson, & Fazio, 2004; Over & Carpenter, 2009; Vaquera & Kao, 2005). Research on
parental racial attitudes and children’s implicit bias has revealed a significant relationship as well (Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005). In sum, parental sources of influence about intergroup attitudes and relationships reflect moral (wrongfulness of discrimination), societal (expectations about societal messages about discrimination), and psychological (psychological adjustment efforts) messages to children.

Increasingly, families, within themselves, are also diverse in many ways given migration, global movement, and more interethnic and interracial relationships along with transracial adoption. Thus, broadening the notion of identity away from a singular group affiliation, as well as unpacking the racial category of “other,” is a fundamental aspect of social and moral development, and one that researchers must continue to examine, as the proscribed boundaries of race and ethnicity rarely reflect intragroup diversity and individuals with multiple and plural group affiliations. A critical examination of moral development and parenting messages in multicultural families will help move the field forward.

Parents, however, are just one source of input. As reviewed in this chapter, peer relationships are fundamentally important for children’s social cognitive development. Thus, it is necessary to understand how both parent and peer influences affect the emergence of prejudice, act as a buffer against experiences of bias, and inform children’s own conceptions of social equity and group identity.

Conclusions and Future Directions

In this chapter, we drew from social domain theory (Turiel, 1983; Smetana, 2006) and social identity theory (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Nesdale, 2004; Verkuyten, 2008) to review research on morality in the context of intergroup relationships. The research discussed here demonstrates that children who justify in-group bias in contexts that have moral relevance, such as resource allocation or social exclusion, appear to do so out of a group loyalty and group functioning, with an age-related decline in the explicit use of stereotypic expectations about individuals. Thus, future studies of early development should examine group loyalty and group functioning, as these constructs have the potential to become the basis for exclusion and, ultimately, prejudice and discrimination. Central questions for future investigations include how children form groups, what constitutes shared interests, and how shared interests become identified with groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, and culture. In-group preference does not necessarily lead to out-group derogation (Nesdale, 2004). Children’s behavior may have prejudicial outcomes for which they are unaware, or for which they have not yet made the connection between in-group affiliation and out-group derogation.

Parental attitudes about prejudice have to go beyond the colorblind approach, given that children are aware of race and ethnicity by the age of 3. When parents discuss egalitarian messages as applied to members of out-groups, children are better prepared for constructing an understanding of equality and fairness, and for applying these concepts to peers from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Further, parents can provide information about the history of intergroup contact as well as the current potential for discrimination that exists in the world to help children understand the complexities of social status and hierarchies.

There may be benefits to including parents in multicultural families to determine how they educate for social justice, as these parents strive to cross group boundaries in
the intimate context of the home. The challenges are great given that societal messages are often designed to perpetuate the status quo and established hierarchies and power arrangements. Studies that focus on the link between parental strategies and child levels of prejudice are few. One exception was a study conducted with Serbian and Bosnian children in which parents who worked to attain more out-group contact had children with less prejudice (Ajdukovic & Biruski, 2008). Yet, very few studies have been conducted to determine parent–child links, and further investigations are warranted.

Another new direction for research is to expand the connections between moral judgment, group dynamics, and knowledge about intentional states, or “theory of mind.” Recent findings reveal that children’s attributions of intentions reveal intergroup bias. Thus, it would be worthwhile to examine whether children have more difficulty considering others’ mental states when intergroup attitudes intervene. This line of research could provide new angles on how social cognitive development is related to intergroup attitudes.

The task for developmental research is to understand the factors that contribute to children’s behavior and the judgments that privilege the group at the cost of fairness and equality. What level of awareness about actions that result in prejudicial treatment does a child hold, and what is the role of peers and adults in this process? Understanding the consequences of one’s actions for others is a complex aspect of moral development, and considering social cognition about groups and group dynamics makes the task for the individual that much more complicated. Yet research in this area has opened the doors to the developmental sources of prejudice and the role that moral judgment plays in enabling individuals to reject actions that reflect bias and discrimination. To determine how best to facilitate morality and reduce prejudice is an important goal and one that moral developmental research can directly address. The broader impact of this research is to help foster a more just and civil society.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Whether lying is morally right or wrong has been debated for centuries (e.g., Augustine, 1952; Bentham, 1843; Kant, 1949; Plato, 1991). This chapter will provide a survey of research over the last 3 decades on the development of the morality of lying. As the literature on children and lying encompasses a broad swath of issues, we will specifically focus on studies that are pertinent to moral development in keeping with the general goal of this handbook. More specifically, we will review research on children’s concepts and moral judgments of lying, children’s actual lying behaviors, and the relation between the two. We will use the speech act theory (Grice, 1980; Searle, 1969) as the framework for examining the existing evidence on children and lying because this theory not only provides the best theoretical framework for organizing and integrating the existing voluminous literature, but it also offers the most parsimonious interpretations of the seemingly disparate and often contradictory findings.

Foundations

The study of children and lying has a long history. The first scientific report on the topic was by Charles Darwin (1877). In “A Biographical Sketch of an Infant” Darwin described his son’s first lie at the tender age of 2 and the child’s clumsy attempt at hiding his deceit when confronted. This report, though rather personal and not at all objective, sowed the seeds of modern scientific research on the development of lying in children.

In the decades that followed, considerable effort was devoted to examining the issue of children and lying by none other than the founding fathers of developmental psychology such as Hall (1890), Stern and Stern (1909), and Piaget (1932/1965). Research on the issue reached its first pinnacle when Hartshorne and May produced their monumental work on children’s honest behavior (Hartshorne & May, 1928), and Piaget published his landmark book, The Moral Judgment of the Child, which systematically examined children’s concepts and moral judgments of lying for the first time (Piaget, 1932/1965).
Despite its auspicious beginning, the research on the development of lying stalled for the next 6 decades, perhaps due to the dominance of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. While Kohlberg did utilize moral dilemmas about lying and the breaking of a promise, the focus of his investigation concerned the process of children’s moral judgments rather than the content of the stories (e.g., lying). By the 1980s, developmental researchers began to show renewed interests in this issue in response to new ideas regarding child development. Among these new ideas was the increased awareness among developmentalists about the crucial roles that intentionality (e.g., Astington, 1986; Astington, Harris, & Olson, 1988) and social convention (e.g., Turiel, 1983) play in cognitive and moral development in general and the development of lying specifically. These ideas ushered in a new era of scientific research on the development of lying. As a result, we now have an increasingly clearer and more comprehensive picture of the development of lying in children. Thus, it is high time to take stock of what we have learned over the last 3 decades and to look ahead and identify the future directions for research in this field. This is the aim of this chapter.

**Theoretical Background: Speech Act Theory**

Among the major components of speech acts, two are most pertinent to the present discussion: First, a speech act is an intentional act that is mediated by the intentional states of the communicator (the intentionality component); second, a speech act is a socially motivated, rule-governed action that is performed to serve an interpersonal function in a social/cultural context (the conventionality component).

**The Intentionality Component**

Speech acts, according to Searle (1969), are intentional behaviors. Due to this “intentionality component,” the meaning and function of a speech act is mediated and determined not only by the literal meaning of a sentence and the actual state of affairs, but also by the intentional states of the communication partners (e.g., the intention or belief of a speaker). Hence, to determine what a specific speech act is and what function it serves, five factors must be considered: the factuality (whether the statement is reflective of reality), the literal meaning (what is actually said), the deeper meaning (the true meaning the speaker wishes the statement to convey), the intention of the speaker (what the speaker aspires to state), and the speaker’s beliefs (speakers beliefs about the state of affairs). By combining these five factors in different ways, we form the intentionality component of various speech acts, which serve different communicative functions (see Table 17.1). Understanding these intentionality components is essential for making morality judgments such as whether someone has told a lie and whether this act of lying entails negative or positive moral values.

Lying is unique in how these components are utilized. When considering the five factors, we find that lying is a speech act where the literal meaning, deeper meaning, and intention are in contrast to what is believed by the speaker (see Table 17.1). For example, the speaker may state A, mean for his or her statement to convey A, intend to state A, but believe B. This discrepancy is referred to as the “intention to deceive” (Bok, 1978;
Chisholm & Feehan, 1977). The fifth factor, factuality, is actually irrelevant to the speech act of lying. Whether or not a statement is a lie depends on a speaker’s intention to deceive rather than on the statement’s reflection of reality.

**The Conventionality Component**

Our socially and culturally defined rules of conversation are referred to as the conventionality component of a speech act (Grice, 1980; Sweetser, 1987). Theorists organize these rules in a hierarchical manner (Sweetser, 1987). At the top of the hierarchy is the general cooperative rule (Sweetser, 1987), stating that speech acts that are intended to help are socially encouraged while speech acts that are intended to harm are eschewed. This cooperative rule is consistent with what is generally considered the moral underpinnings of moral judgments—others’ welfare and avoiding harm.

The second level of the hierarchy is divided into two different settings: the informational setting and the politeness setting. In the informational setting, the main goal is to communicate information to one another, and it is expected that Grice’s four maxims of conversation will apply to the exchange of information (Grice, 1980). The maxim of quantity states that one must provide as much information as is required for the purpose of the exchange. The maxim of quality requires the speaker to be truthful. The maxim of relation expects the speaker to convey information that is relevant. The maxim of manner requires speakers to be clear and distinct in their statements. In contrast, in politeness settings, speakers are expected to follow Lakoff’s (1973) rules of politeness, which are intended to help maintain social relationships. Some of Lakoff’s rules include the following: Be amicable, do not impose, and provide options.

Lying in some situations directly violates the fundamental rules of communication (e.g., the general cooperative rule and the maxim of quality). When discovered, these rule violations associated with lying often evoke strong emotional reactions from the recipient. In contrast, in other situations, lying is consistent with the fundamental rules of communication (e.g., lies told to spare another’s feelings). In these situations, lying is in fact condoned, while honesty is discouraged. In the review below, we will illustrate how both the intentionality and conventionality components influence children’s understanding, evaluation, and production of lies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of verbal communication</th>
<th>Literal meaning</th>
<th>Deeper meaning</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Factuality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Accurate/honest statement</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Honest mistake</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Verbal error</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Metaphor</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A–B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Irony/sarcasm</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Not A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Lie</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Current Research

Research on Children’s Understanding of Lies

Determining whether a statement is a lie or not is not an easy task, as social conventions are often practiced but not explicitly explained. To form a mature concept of lying, children must realize that when a speaker intends to deceive the listener and makes a statement they believe to be false, they are telling a lie (Chisholm & Feehan, 1977). In addition, children must consider what social norms and rules, which are often implicit and unspoken, may have been violated when making such a statement.

To further complicate the task for children, adults in children’s environments are not consistent in practicing what they preach. They regularly lie themselves to other adults (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998) as well as to children, sometimes even in the name of parenting (Heyman, Luua, & Lee, 2009). Parents sometimes punish children who confess their transgressions (Wilson, Smith, & Ross, 2003) and show strong negative reactions to tattling, a form of truth telling about minor or trivial transgressions of another person (Chiu Loke, Heyman, Forgie, McCarthy, & Lee, 2011; Ingram & Bering, 2010). Furthermore, parents encourage children to tell white lies when receiving undesirable gifts (Saarni, 1984; Talwar, Lee, Bala, & Lindsay, 2006).

These challenges may explain why the acquisition of the mature understanding of the concept of lying is a protracted process that begins in early childhood and lasts well into adolescence.

Intentionality Component

Studies have indicated that children begin to understand the concept of lying during the preschool years (Bussey, 1992, 1999; Siegal & Peterson, 1996; Talwar & Lee, 2002a). While children typically do not confuse lying with other behavioral misdeeds (e.g., theft or vandalism), young children have been found to mistake other prohibited or discouraged verbal behaviors as lies (e.g., swearing: Berthoud-Papandropoulou & Kilcher, 2003; Bussey, 1992; Peterson, Peterson, & Seeto, 1983; Piaget, 1932/1965).

Additional evidence suggests that, when defining lying, children take into consideration three major factors in the intentionality components at different ages. At around 5 years of age, children begin by using the factuality of a statement to determine whether a statement is a lie. For example, Peterson et al. (1983) found that 5-year olds classified incorrect guesses (e.g., incorrectly guessing someone’s age) as lies. However, according to the speech act theory, the factuality of a statement does not determine whether it is a lie. Thus, children often make incorrect categorizations (Bussey, 1992; Peterson et al., 1983; Piaget, 1932/1965; Strichartz & Burton, 1990; Wimmer, Gruber & Perner, 1984).

Piaget (1932/1965) found that young children did not use the speaker’s intentions when determining whether the statement was a lie. Specifically, he discovered that children would classify honest mistakes, where the speaker does not intend to deceive the listener but makes a factually false statement, as lies. Peterson et al. (1983) replicated Piaget’s findings, demonstrating that children did not use the speaker’s intentions to determine whether a statement is a lie until 11 years of age.
Lying, Morality, and Development

Wimmer, Gruber, and Perner (1984) were among the first to study the role of belief in children's conception of lying. They presented 4- to 12-year-old children with a series of short stories with three protagonists. Protagonist A passed information to B and then B passed information to C. In one scenario, A intentionally passed false information to B, and B did not know the information was false when he passed it on to C. Children were then asked to determine whether A and B were telling a lie. They found that children as young as 4 years were able to correctly classify A as telling a lie. However, children under the age of 7 neglected to consider B's belief about the statement and incorrectly classified the statement as a lie. Children 8 to 10 years old also incorrectly labeled B's statement as a lie when the information was received from A. Thus, it appears that to children under 11 years of age, a lie takes on a constant untruthful life of its own and remains a lie even when it is uttered by an innocent party. However, unlike the younger children, 8- to 10-year olds did not categorize B's false statement to be a lie when the statement was derived from his own false belief about a true state of affairs.

The above studies on the concept of lying were based on a propositional perspective that requires a statement to be classified as a lie only when it meets all the criteria listed in Table 17.1. If a statement fails to meet just one criterion, it should not be classified as a lie. Coleman and Kay (1981) suggested that to lay people, most concepts, including lying, are not defined in such an all-or-none fashion. Rather, concepts are formed prototypically with different criteria contributing unequally to their definition. Based on Coleman and Kay's theory, Strichartz and Burton (1990) systematically varied the presence or absence of all three factors (intention, belief, and factuality). They found that preschool children and first graders labeled statements as lies or truths based solely on the factuality of the statement. Although fifth graders took belief and intention into consideration, they were reluctant to let the belief factor override the factuality of the statement and did so only when the intention of the speaker was to deceive. By adulthood, the belief factor was more important than either intention or factuality and when all three factors were combined, adults' judgments were the most consistent. This study suggests that the concept of a lie and the truth is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon but a prototypical one where all three factors have different weights and play different roles in the development of the concept of lying at different ages.

Siegal and his colleagues (Gilli, Marchetti, Siegal & Peterson, 2001; Siegal & Peterson, 1996, 1998) suggested that one of the reasons that children fail to categorize lies correctly in the existing work was both the format of the probe question and the context in which the question is asked. They thus revised the question format to, “Was it a lie or a mistake?” as opposed to the traditional format of, “Was it a lie or not a lie?” They argued that by contrasting the lie against the mistake, children are encouraged to consider the speaker's intention. Siegal and Peterson also created scenarios that were familiar to children and that the children could relate to involving the contamination of food. Results indicated that when these two methodological alterations were made, even 3- to 5-year olds could correctly identify the difference between a lie and a mistake.

Following Siegal and colleagues' idea that the format of the question mattered when assessing children's understanding of truth and lies, Lyon and colleagues conducted a series of studies examining the type of information requested of a child based on the question format. For example, some questions simply require children to recognize whether a statement is true or false, while other question formats require children to provide a definition (“What is a
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lie?”) or identify the difference between the concepts of the truth or a lie. Lyon and Saywitz (1999) revealed that question format does indeed matter when questioning children about their understanding of truth and lies. Specifically, children’s ability to identify what is the truth and what is a lie far exceeds their ability to define the terms, with 4- and 5-year olds being able to successfully identify truths and lies and most children up to 7 years of age unable to define such terms. Recently, Lyon, Carrick, and Quas (2010), using simplified tasks that exclusively focused on the truth or falsity of statements made by vignette characters, found that even 3-year olds were able to label true (e.g., A boy looks at a cat and says “It’s a cat”) and false statements (e.g., A boy looks at a cat and says “It’s a dog”) as “truth” or “lie.”

Although these findings demonstrating the children can successfully identify truths and lies at a young age are inconsistent with previous research (Bussey, 1992, 1999; Peterson et al., 1983; Strichartz & Burton, 1990; Wimmer et al., 1984), this does not necessarily invalidate previous conclusions. In the recent studies, young children demonstrate an understanding when critical information was highlighted, when question format was simplified, and when the situation was familiar to them. However, they, unlike older children, cannot generalize their early understanding of lies to many different situations when these factors are not present (e.g., Bussey, 1992, 1999; Peterson et al., 1983; Strichartz & Burton, 1990; Wimmer et al., 1984). Thus, based on the existing evidence, whereas preschoolers may have an incipient ability to consider a speaker’s belief or intention in their categorization of a statement as a lie, it is not until adolescence that the speaker’s belief and intention are spontaneously used as a critical factor when determining whether a statement is a lie (Strichartz & Burton, 1990; Wimmer et al., 1984).

**Conventionality Component**

Cultural background has been found to influence adults’ categorization of lies in different social contexts (Fu, Lee, Cameron & Xu, 2001). For example, Fu et al. (2001) found that while Chinese and Canadian adults similarly categorized intentional untruthful statements to conceal one’s transgression as lies, they differed in their categorizations of untruthful statements told to be modest (e.g., concealing one’s donation to a charity or helping a person in need of help). Specifically, while almost all Canadian adults categorized untruthful statements to be modest as lies, a substantial number of Chinese adults did not consider them to be lies. This may be due to the fact that modesty is highly valued in the collectivist Chinese society (Bond, 1986).

However, developmental studies have so far failed to obtain evidence that children from different cultures categorize lies told in different social contexts differently (e.g., Lee, Xu, Fu, Cameron & Chen, 2001; Xu, Bao, Fu, Talwar, & Lee, 2010). For example, Lee, Xu, Fu, Cameron, and Chen (2001) examined lies told for modesty purposes with 7- to 11-year olds in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Canada. Contrary to the results with adults, they found that most children in all three locales labeled a lie as a lie and the truth as the truth. This finding has been replicated with data obtained from children and adolescents in both urban and rural areas of China and Japan, as well as those from Canada and the United States (e.g., Fu et al., 2010; Fu, Heyman, & Lee, 2011; Heyman, Itakura, & Lee, 2010). The same patterns of results (Fu et al., 2007; Sweet, Heyman, Fu, & Lee, 2010; Xu et al., 2010) were also obtained from Chinese, Canadian, and American children regarding
white lies (untruthful statements told to be polite) and blue lies (untruthful statements told to help a collective). While white lies are sanctioned in both the Eastern and Western cultures, blue lies are more generally condoned by the Eastern Asian societies (although the term blue lie actually originated from the fact that police men and women in the United States in blue uniforms are thought to lie in the name of protection of the force and the legal system; Barnes, 1994). Regardless of their cultures’ endorsement of white and blue lies, unlike adults, children of all ages categorize untruthful statements as lies regardless of whether they serve to adhere to specific cultural conventions.

However, this is not true when an untruthful statement violates the general cooperative rule of communication and is made with an intention to harm the listener (Sweetser, 1987). Lee and Ross (1997) tested this idea with 12-, 16-, and 19-year olds. They found that statements in the harm condition (e.g., a story character intentionally misleads someone about the cost of a textbook so that the person will end up at the store without enough money) were rated as more of a lie than statements in a help condition (e.g., a doctor does not tell his patient of the possible side effect of hair loss to a patient to ensure the patient takes the medicine, which he needs). Additionally, lies told in an informational setting were rated as more of a lie than lies told in a politeness setting. Xu, Luo, Fu, and Lee (2009) recently followed up the Lee and Ross (1997) study by including Chinese children between 7 and 11 years of age and adults. They found that like the adolescents and adults in Lee and Ross (1997), elementary school children took into consideration jointly the communicative intent and setting factors when defining the concept of lying. Thus, at least from 7 years of age, children’s definition of lying is not just concerned with whether a speaker’s statement meets the intentionality criteria of lying listed in Table 17.1, nor whether the statement serves a specific cultural function (e.g., modesty). Rather, before they decide whether the statement is likely to be a lie, they still consider whether the speaker’s general communicative intent is to help or harm the listener, as well as whether the information communicated serves to inform the listener.

In contrast to the previous studies, Siegal, Surian, Nemeroff, and Peterson (2001) found that specific cultural experiences can influence children’s evaluation of lies. Children 4 to 5 years old who were attending Catholic school were presented with a situation in which two girls were either blessed by a priest (blessed condition) or just shook the priest’s hand (not blessed condition). The girls then proceeded to either make a mistake or tell a lie. Children in the blessed condition were more likely to classify the girl’s lying behavior as a mistake than children in the not blessed condition. However, this condition was not found with children from non-Catholic schools. Thus, it is appears that when an intentional false statement is somewhat sanctioned by an authority figure (e.g., a priest), children who have been socialized in that religious cultural context no longer just use the intentionality factors to determine whether the statement is a lie. Siegal et al.'s findings are somewhat concerning given the child abuse scandals within the Catholic Church. However, it is currently unclear whether children’s ratings of such behavior translate to their behaviors in this situation.

Research on Children’s Moral Judgments of Lies

Philosophers have debated for centuries over whether lying is always morally wrong or whether its morality is determined by social and cultural conventions. One extreme
philosophical school posits that honesty is morally right and lying is wrong under all circumstances without exceptions (Fillmore, 1975). Kant (1949) even suggested that if he were asked by a would-be murderer about the whereabouts of his intended victim, he would tell the truth. Apparently, to Kant, the moral consequence of lying is so grave that he would be willing to sacrifice a human life to avoid it!

This perspective contrasts with the Utilitarian perspective pioneered by Bentham (1843) and Mill (1869). Utilitarian theorists believe that moral implications of honesty and lying are context-dependent. Traditional Utilitarians argued that falsehoods that enhance happiness or avoid pain are not wrong. Modern Utilitarians, although no longer so hedonistic, nonetheless believe that cultural conventions determine the moral implications of honesty and lying. When interlocutors are expected to adhere to the so-called maxim of quality (to inform, not misinform), lies indeed entail negative moral values; when social conventions call for politeness to spare another person’s feelings, false statements are sanctioned and/or promoted (Sweetser, 1987). Indeed, anthropological, sociological, and psychological evidence suggests that some cultures may sanction and even promote lying in certain contexts (Bond, 1986; Gilsenan, 1976; Ochs, 1976; Triandis, 1995).

**Intentionality Component**

The research on children’s moral judgments of lying was also pioneered by Piaget (1932/1965). Piaget examined children’s evaluations of lies by presenting them with two story characters, one who told the truth and one who told a lie, and asking children to evaluate who was naughtier. Piaget found that younger children tended to judge a lie that was punished as more “naughty” than a lie that was not punished. With increased age, they began to consider how different the lie was from the truth. The more different the statement was from the truth, the more naughty it was rated. However, Piaget found that until 10 years of age, children did not consider the speaker’s intention when making moral evaluations. Furthermore, children under 10 years of age tended to rate a story character who intentionally gave someone incorrect directions, yet the traveler still found the correct location, as less naughty than a story character who intends to give correct directions, yet the traveler gets lost.

Since Piaget’s original work, many researchers, utilizing different methodologies, found that Piaget may have underestimated children’s moral judgments of lies (e.g., Bussey, 1992, 1999; Gilli et al., 2001). Peterson et al. (1983) argued that requiring children to compare the two stories may have been too cognitively demanding for young children. When only asking children to evaluate one character’s behavior, Peterson et al. (1983) found that 5- to 11-year olds were able to use the character’s intention when making an evaluation about the morality of their behavior. Subsequent studies have shown that even preschoolers as young as 3 years of age make appropriate moral judgments of lying and truth telling about misdeeds when it is made clear to them that a speaker has deliberately made a false statement (Bussey, 1992, 1999; Bussey & Grimbeek, 2000; Lyon et al, 2010; Talwar, Lee, Bala, & Lindsay, 2002). Thus, the existing evidence taken together suggests that even preschool-aged children provide different moral evaluations for lying versus truth telling. Also, children begin to use the speaker’s intention to make their moral judgments around 5 years of age and reach a mature level by about 10 to 11 years of age.
Conventionality Component

Consistent with the Utilitarian perspective, empirical evidence obtained in the last 2 decades strongly suggests that social and cultural contexts play an important role in children's moral judgments of lying and its development. It has been consistently found that lying to protect an individual after the person commits an antisocial act is rated highly negatively by children and adults in different cultures (e.g., Bussey, 1999; Lee et al., 2001; Peterson et al., 1983). In contrast, a number of other social contexts have been identified where both children and adults do not automatically give highly negative moral evaluations to lies.

One situation where lies are not consistently rated negatively is the politeness situation, where one tells a white lie to spare the feelings of the lie recipient. Studies have shown that children as young as 6 years old evaluate white lies (e.g., stating liking an undesirable gift) less negatively than malicious lies, and blunt truths (e.g., stating disliking an undesirable gift) and less positively than truths to confess one's own transgression (Bussey, 1992; Peterson et al., 1983; Xu et al., 2010). Furthermore, older children and adults actually give positive ratings to white lies and negative ratings to blunt truths (Walper & Valtin, 1992; Xu, Luo, Fu, & Lee, 2009). Ma, Xu, Heyman, and Lee (2010) further found that children considered the social context of a white lie when making moral evaluations. They rated blunt truth telling (e.g., telling someone that she has an ugly haircut) more negatively and lie telling more positively in a public situation (e.g., in front of a group, where telling the blunt truth is likely to have negative social consequences) than in private (when no one else is around). This finding was found to strengthen with increased age.

Another situation is the so-called modesty situation where some cultures (e.g., East Asian cultures) place a strong emphasis on one's need to show modesty in their communication with others. For example, Lee et al. (1997) reported significant differences between Chinese and Canadian children in their moral judgments. Specifically, Chinese children rated truth telling about one's own prosocial behaviors less positively and lie telling more positively than Canadian children. In addition, these cross-cultural differences increased with age. At age 7, Chinese children rated modest lies somewhat negatively and truth telling quite positively. As age increased, Chinese children rated modest lies increasingly more positively and immodest truths less positively, whereas Canadian children's evaluations remained constantly highly negative for lying and highly positive for truth telling about one's own good deeds. This “modesty effect” with Chinese children has been consistently replicated with Chinese adults (Barron & Sackett, 2008; Fu et al., 2008) and Taiwanese (Lee et al., 2001), Korean, and Japanese children.

Lee and colleagues (1997, 2001) speculated that these cross-cultural differences might stem from the differential emphasis on individualism and collectivism in the Eastern Asian and Western cultures. Although the exact nature of the individualism and collectivism constructs are still controversial (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Killen & Wainryb, 2000; Schwartz, 1994), empirical evidence suggests that these constructs capture critical structural differences between Eastern and Western cultures (see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier [2002] for a meta-analysis). Although both individualism and collectivism generally encourage honesty and discourage lying, the goals and conventions for interpersonal information exchange are dramatically different between the two orientations. In predominantly individualistic societies, personal rights to information, autonomy, and self-esteem are
primary concerns that tend to guide interpersonal communication (Killen & Wainryb, 2000; Kupfer, 1982; Neff & Helwig, 2002). As a result, the goal of personal growth in North American countries tends to be centered on developing a positive self-image and therefore, valuing self-enhancement above humility (Wang & Leichtman, 2000). Individuals are thus encouraged to acknowledge, not minimize, their own personal achievements and good deeds. Conversely, in predominantly collectivist societies, the focus of information exchange is on whether a verbal statement serves to facilitate social cohesiveness and fulfill the goals of a collective (Bond, 1986). In the case of information about one’s personal achievements and good deeds, disclosing it may have detrimental effects on group cohesion and the common goals of the group, whereas showing humility may enhance group harmony and facilitate group work (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982). Based on such cultural analyses, Lee et al. (2001) suggested that differential emphasis on individualism and collectivism in different societies may affect the way in which individuals disclose information about themselves during interpersonal communication. Thus, developmental changes related to the modesty effect may reflect the difference in the socialization of individualism and collectivism in Eastern Asian and North American societies.

To test this hypothesis, Fu et al. (2010) read similar stories as those used in Lee et al. (1997) to Chinese children between the ages of 7 and 11 years except for one difference. In some of the stories, the story characters would tell a lie or the truth about their good deeds to their teacher in front of a group or in private without the presence of other group members. Consistent with the hypothesis, Chinese children rated modest lies more positively than immodest truths, with this effect becoming more pronounced with age. Chinese children from more traditional families rated immodest truths less positively when they were told in front of a group than in private. Furthermore, Chinese children of parents with high collectivism scores valued modest lies more than did children of parents with low collectivism scores. A follow-up study by Fu and his colleagues (Fu et al., 2011) with adolescents replicated these findings. Furthermore, they found that a high collectivist orientation and low individualistic orientation in adolescents themselves was significantly associated with their higher ratings of modesty-based lying in public.

In addition to the moral judgments of modesty-related lies, collectivism also seems to have an impact on the development of blue lies, or untruthful statements told to help one’s collective. In Fu, Xu, Cameron, Heyman, and Lee (2007), children between the ages of 7 and 11 years of age were shown moral dilemmas where story characters were faced with the choice of either telling a lie to help a friend or telling the truth to help one’s collective (e.g., one’s school) or vice versa. The story characters then made a decision either to help a friend or a collective. Chinese children rated lies told to help the collective but harm the individual less negatively than the opposite. In addition, Chinese children rated truth telling to help the individual but harm the collective less positively than the reverse. Conversely, Canadian children did the opposite. These findings were completely replicated by Fu et al. (2008). However, it should be noted that children are also aware that collectivism does not give one the carte blanche to tell lies for the collective in any situation. When Sweet, Heyman, Fu, and Lee (2010) showed Chinese and American children stories in which story characters lied to conceal their groups’ transgressions, Chinese children viewed such lies even less favorably than did U.S. children. Thus, to Chinese children, there is a limit to how much collectivism could trump honesty, which in turn shows sophistication in children’s growing sense of morality.
This is also reflected in adolescents’ careful differentiation of the implications of lying in the moral, personal, and prudential domains. For example, Perkins and Turiel (2007) asked 12- to 17-year olds to evaluate the morality of telling a lie in a variety of different contexts that are concerned with moral, personal, and prudential issues. As expected, adolescents evaluated lying to conceal a moral transgression as wrong. However, their judgments about lying in other situations varied depending on both the domain in which a lie is told as well as to whom a lie is told. They judged lies to parents regarding prudential acts (e.g., riding a motorcycle) and lies to friends regarding all domains as unacceptable. Also, they found lies against parents’ directives to engage moral violations as well as lies to counter parental restrictions on personal activities as acceptable. One of the reasons that adolescents find deception to be morally acceptable in these situations is that, according to Turiel’s moral theory of subversion (2005), in situations where there are inequalities and injustices in an oppressive and hierarchical system, individuals will use strategies such as deception to resist and to protect themselves. Thus, although adolescents in Perkins and Turiel (2007) viewed deception as generally undesirable, they also saw deception as an acceptable strategy to deal with unfair restrictions imposed by those in greater power and control. Thus, in addition to the influence of social and cultural norms on children’s moral judgments of lying, with increased age, an awareness of inequality and injustice may also lead children to modify their moral stances against dishonesty in certain social contexts.

Research on Children’s Lie-Telling Behavior

As with children’s conceptualization and evaluation of lies, the intentionality and conventionality components play important roles in children’s production of lies. To successfully tell a lie, children must have an understanding that their verbal statements can have a direct impact on another person’s mental state (the intentionality component). For example, by lying, one can instill a false belief into the mind of another person. In addition, children must learn to refrain from telling the truth in some situations in order to adhere to the social norms and rules of their societies (the conventionality component). In these situations, they must instead make an intentionally false statement.

Intentionality Component

By definition, to tell a lie, a lie teller must be able to intentionally produce a false statement that differs from his or her true belief, with intent to deceive the listener. There is evidence to suggest that this ability emerges and develops rapidly in preschool years. In their classic study, Lewis, Stanger, and Sullivan (1989) placed 3-year olds in a so-called temptation resistance situation where children are asked not peek at a toy in the experimenter’s absence. Due to the highly tempting nature of the situation, most young children cannot resist the temptation and thus transgress by peeking at the toy. This high transgression rate makes it possible to examine whether young children will be honest or dishonest when directly asked about their behavior. Lewis et al. (1989) found that children as young as 3 years of age lied about their peeking. Subsequently, a series of studies with similar temptation resistance paradigms reveal that children from 2 years onward would deny peeking at the toy when asked (Evans & Lee, Evans & Lee, 2013; Evans & Lee, 2011; also see Talwar &
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However, there is a systematic age-related change in the rate of lying: At 2 to 3 years of age, the majority of children are honest and they would confess their transgression, whereas from 4 years of age onward, the majority of children would lie to deny their transgression. These findings suggest that preschool children begin to make deliberate false statements that are inconsistent with their own true belief, although the exact age at which they do so has been a topic of controversy (see Ahern, Lyon, & Quas, 2011; Stern & Stern, 1909).

Young children’s denial of peeking cannot simply be attributed to their forgetting (the forgetting hypothesis) because the probe question is asked almost immediately after the child has just peeked at the toy. Further, only children who have peeked deny peeking, and almost none of the children who have resisted peeking falsely confess that they have. The fact that younger children are more likely to admit to peeking than older children also does not support the forgetting hypothesis. According to the existing memory development literature (Bauer, 2008; Schneider & Bjorklund, 1998), if the forgetting hypothesis is true, younger children, not older children, should be more likely to forget having peeked at the toy and deny their peeking (thus, resulting in younger children being more likely to tell a lie). Nevertheless, although the above arguments are compelling, more direct evidence is needed to ascertain that when young children are making a false statement, the statement indeed differs from their true belief about the reality and is made with intent to deceive the listener.

To address this issue more directly, Polak and Harris (1999) assigned children to either an experimental condition where children at 3 and 5 years of age were not allowed to play with a toy, or a control condition where they were permitted to do so. No children in the control condition denied having played with the toy, whereas many in the experimental condition did. This finding suggests that children who lie may indeed intentionally make a false statement that differs from their true beliefs. However, age differences have been found regarding whether children lie with an intent to deceive the lie recipient. Researchers (Peskin, 1992; Sodian, 1991) assigned children to either a competitive condition where they must lie to an opponent to win a desirable item (e.g., a toy or sticker) or a cooperative condition where they do not have to lie to obtain the item. They found that while most of the older preschoolers only lied in the competitive condition, most of the younger children tended to tell the truth, regardless of which condition they were in. These findings suggest that children might not understand that the purpose of lying is to install a false belief in the lie recipient’s belief system.

Because the age-related shift in children’s tendency to lie coincides with a developmental change in children’s understanding of intentionality (i.e., theory of mind in general and false belief understanding specifically), it has been suggested that these two abilities may be related (e.g., Chandler, Fritz, & Hala, 1989; Peskin, 1992; Sodian, Taylor, Harris, & Perner, 1991). Lying, by definition, is making a statement with the intent to instill a false belief in the mind of its recipient. Thus, lying in essence is theory of mind in action. A number of studies have explored the relation between false belief understanding and the lying tendency in children as young as 3 years of age (Evans et al., 2011; Polak & Harris, 1999; Talwar, Gordon, & Lee, 2007; Talwar & Lee, 2008a). It has been consistently found that the better children’s performance in the false belief tasks, the more likely children would lie to conceal their transgression (Evans, Xu, & Lee, 2011; Polak & Harris,
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1999; Talwar et al., 2007; Talwar & Lee, 2008a) after parsing out the effect of age. In other words, regardless of age, as long as children understand that an individual may possess a false belief that differs from reality, they are more likely to lie.

In addition to this correlational evidence, recent experimental studies suggest that children do consider the lie recipient's mental states when deciding whether to lie to the individual. For example, Fu, Evans, Xu, and Lee (2012) put children between 3 and 5 years in a temptation resistance situation where the majority of the children peeked at a forbidden toy when left alone. When the experimenter returned, she claimed that she knew whether the children had transgressed because she had obtained the information, plausibly, from an informant who actually witnessed the children's transgression or, implausibly, from an informant who did not witness the transgression and was a far distance away. Children, including those at 3 years of age, were significantly more likely to lie to deny peeking in the implausible condition than in the plausible condition. This finding suggests that children are able to decide whether to tell a lie to the lie recipient depending on their assessment of whether the lie recipient already possesses the true belief that children wish to conceal, demonstrating the importance of children’s theory of mind understanding for telling strategic lies.

Further evidence of children’s ability to take another’s beliefs into consideration comes from studies that examined not only children’s tendency to lie but also their ability to maintain consistency between the initial lie and subsequent statements. Such consistency is important for a lie to be successful because inconsistencies are often used by lie recipients as clues that an individual has lied (Evans & Lee, 2011; Talwar & Lee, 2002a; Talwar & Lee, 2008a). In the literature, the ability to strategically maintain consistency between statements is called “semantic leakage control” (Feldman & White, 1980). Research has found that young children are not successful in controlling such leakage across statements (Evans et al., 2011; Polak & Harris, 1999; Talwar & Lee, 2002a). For example, in Talwar and Lee (2002a), when asked if they had peeked at the toy while the researcher was gone, the majority of children lied and said “no.” However, when children were asked what they thought the toy was, younger children blurted out the correct answer (e.g., Barney), thus revealing the fact that they had peeked. While the majority of 3- to 5-year olds blurted out the correct answer, almost half of the 6- and 7-year olds feigned ignorance to the toy’s identity, thus concealing their transgression.

It has been further found that although some older children failed to feign ignorance, they provided more plausible explanations than younger children (Evans et al., 2011; Talwar et al., 2007; Talwar & Lee, 2008a). For example, Evans, Xu, and Lee (2011) used a modified temptation resistance peeking paradigm in which physical evidence would be left behind if a child peeked in the experimenter’s absence (the contents of a cup were scattered on the table if the child lifted the cup to check what was inside). When asked why the contents came out of the cup, children at 4 and 5 years, but not 3 years, provided plausible explanations consistent to conceal their transgression.

This ability to maintain consistency across statements appears to require a more complex cognitive process. For example, when children, after having peeked at a forbidden toy, are asked to identify the toy, they must infer what belief they should have (i.e., not knowing the true identity of the toy: a false belief) given the fact that they have denied having peeked at the toy (another false belief). Thus, semantic leakage control requires children
to create a false belief based on another false belief (a second-order false belief). Previous research has demonstrated that second-order theory of mind understanding begins to emerge only around 6 years of age and develops into adolescence (Hogrefe, Wimmer, & Perner, 1986; Sullivan, Zaitchik, & Tager-Flusberg, 1994). A study by Talwar et al. (2007) demonstrated that the more complex second-order false-belief understanding is significantly related to children's semantic leakage control. They found that children who scored higher on the second-order belief task were also more likely to intentionally give incorrect answers to follow-up questions about details on an answer sheet than the children who had peeked but had lower second-order belief task scores.

The existing studies taken together suggest that intentionality, or theory of mind understanding, plays an important role in both children's tendency to lie and their success in lying. More specifically, children's decision to lie appears to be related to first-order false belief understanding: The better children understand that others may have first-order false beliefs, the more likely they lie. Children's second-order theory of mind understanding appears to be involved in children's ability to exercise semantic leakage control, or maintain consistency between their initial lie and subsequent statements.

It should be noted, however, that theory of mind understanding alone is insufficient for successfully lying to conceal a transgression. It has been consistently found that, in addition to theory of mind, children's executive functioning abilities in the form of inhibitory control, working memory, and planning ability play an important role in children's decision to lie and their success in lying between 2 and 16 years of age (Carlson, Moses, & Hix, 1998; Evans & Lee, 2011, Talwar & Lee, 2008a). For example, executive functioning as measured by the Stroop task, in which one must inhibit a proponent response while producing an alternative response, and its modified version (e.g., Gerstadt, Hong, & Diamond, 1994; Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000) has been consistently found to be correlated with children's decision to lie and semantic leakage control (Evans & Lee, 2011, Evans et al., 2011; Talwar & Lee, 2008a). It appears that whereas children's theory of mind understanding allows children to create appropriate contents for their lies and subsequent statements, their executive functioning abilities enable them to manage these contents to be delivered in such a manner that they serve to deceive the lie recipient.

**Conventionality Component**

As is the case with moral judgments, social and cultural conventions also play a role in children's lying behavior. As children are socialized to become members of their society, they become increasingly aware that social norms and conventions require them to sometimes refrain from telling the honest truth. In comparison with research on the role of intentionality in the development of lie telling, a limited number of studies have been conducted to examine the emergence and development of children's lying to be in conformity with social norms.

Talwar and Lee (2002b) were perhaps among the first to examine this issue. They investigated whether young children would tell the blunt truth when someone had unusual facial marks. With the use of a Reverse Rouge paradigm, 3- to 7-year olds were asked to take a photograph of the experimenter. Prior to taking the photo, the experimenter, with
a large red mark on his/her nose, asked the child, “Do I look OK for the photo?” Regardless of age, the majority of children told a *white lie* to the experimenter stating that the experimenter looked OK, but later the children told a confederate that the experimenter did not look OK. This result suggests that children as young as 3 years of age appear to already understand that it is inappropriate to honestly point out another’s anomalous appearance in front of the person, although they could do so behind the person’s back.

In addition to learning about how to communicate about another’s appearance, children appear to learn at an early age about how to be polite when receiving undesirable gifts. In a study by Talwar, Murphy, and Lee (2006), 3- to 11-year-old Canadian children played a game with an experimenter and received a wrapped gift as a prize for playing the game. When the experimenter left the room, the child opened the gift (a bar of white soap). While the experimenter was out of the room, all children indicated that they did not like the gift. However, when the experimenter returned and asked the children if they liked the gift, the majority of children spontaneously told a white lie and said they liked it. When asked why they liked the soap, some children even went so far as to say they collected soap or that they just ran out of soap at home (both of which were not true according to their parents). As age increased, children were significantly more likely to tell a white lie. Xu et al. (2010) examined white lie-telling behaviors in Chinese children using similar methods as Talwar et al. (2007) and obtained similar results. These results indicate that children are socialized to tell white lies at a very early age.

As mentioned earlier, studies completed in East Asia have found that children conceptually tend to favor lies told to benefit the collective (blue lies) over lies told to benefit a friend or oneself (Fu et al., 2007). When Fu, Wang, and Lee (2008) placed 7-, 9-, and 11-year-old Chinese children in a real life situation in which they had to decide whether or not to lie to conceal their class’s cheating behavior, they found that many of the Chinese children lied to conceal their class’s collective decision to cheat in a school district competition, and this tendency increased with age.

Taken together, the current evidence suggests that children from an early age apply the social and conventional rules for a given context or culture when deciding to tell lies, and as they become more socialized, they more readily apply these rules and tell lies accordingly.

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**The Relation Between Children’s Lie-Telling Behavior and Their Understanding of Lies**

Despite extensive research on children’s concept and understanding of lies and, to a lesser extent, children’s lie-telling behaviors, there have been very few studies that assess the relation between the two. Many studies of the relation between children’s moral conception of lying and their actual lying behavior to conceal their transgression have failed to reveal any significant correlations. For example, Talwar et al. (2002a) measured both children’s conceptual knowledge of lies as well as their actual lie-telling behavior. Results indicated that children’s conceptual knowledge about lying was not directly related to their actual lie-telling behavior. Many of the children demonstrated an appropriate moral knowledge of lying (that lying to conceal one’s transgression is wrong) but nevertheless told lies themselves to conceal their own transgression. Similar null results were also found when
children must lie to protect their parents when their parents transgressed and broke a toy in the laboratory (Talwar et al., 2004).

One possibility of the failure to find significant correlations between children’s moral knowledge of lying and their actual behavior was the lack of variability in children’s responses to the simple questions posed in Talwar et al. (2002a) because most children, including 3-year olds, rated lying to conceal a transgression highly negatively and truth telling highly positively. To avoid this problem, Talwar and Lee (2008a) used a battery of measures that assessed children’s moral understandings of lies and other falsehoods (e.g., honest mistake, joke). With the use of factor analysis, three factors were identified: factuality (e.g., whether a statement is true), motivation (e.g., whether the statement intends to deceive), and promise (e.g., whether the statement suggests the execution of an action in the future). Children who scored high on the factuality dimension tended to be more likely to tell the truth. That is, when children were more concerned whether a statement was factually true when making a moral judgment, they were more likely to confess about their own transgression. It should be noted that these children tended to be at the youngest ages. In contrast, whether children scored high on the motivation or promise dimensions did not predict whether they would lie or confess about their own transgression. It appears that when children’s moral judgments were affected by their concerns about the intention to deceive, such concerns did not translate into real actions on their part. Thus, when it comes to the relation between children’s moral judgments of lying and their actual lying behavior to conceal a transgression, there exists a disconnection (see Blasi, 1980; Thoma, 1994; Walker, 2004). One of the conclusions from the existing studies with adults is that adults are moral hypocrites who may talk morally but act immorally (Batson, Thompson, Seuferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999). The evidence from children in the domain of lying seems to suggest that children may also be moral hypocrites who preach but do not practice honesty (Talwar et al., 2002a).

However, this suggestion may be premature. Xu et al. (2010) examined the relation between 7-, 9-, and 11-year-old children’s moral understanding of white lies and their actual lie-telling behaviors in a politeness setting. Contrary to previous results, children’s moral knowledge about lying was significantly related to children’s actual behaviors. More specifically, the more positive children rated white lie-telling in hypothetical situations, the more likely children told a white lie themselves to a gift giver about an undesirable gift. This significant relation was particularly true when children’s rationales underlying their moral judgments and actions were considered. That is, when children judged white lie-telling in hypothetical situations appropriately as for politeness and avoidance of harm, they would be more likely to tell a white lie to be polite to the lie recipient.

Similarly, Fu et al. (2008) also studied the relation between children’s conceptual knowledge of lying and children’s actual lie-telling behavior in a “blue lie” situation. Chinese children 7, 9, and 11 years old were placed in a real-life situation where they had to decide whether to lie to conceal their group’s cheating behavior (behavioral measure). Children’s willingness to endorse lying or truth telling that benefits a collective was evaluated hypothetical stories. Results revealed that children’s endorsement and positive moral evaluations about blue lies in hypothetical situations significantly predicted their actual behavior.

These conflicting results may be explained by examining the types of lies under investigation. It may be that social and moral norms tend to guide our moral value judgments.
more strongly than social–situational factors, while social–situational factors guide our ac-
tions more strongly than social and moral norms. When faced with making a decision of
whether to tell a lie about a transgression, children’s moral values may encourage them to
tell the truth while the social–situational factors of self-protection compel them to tell a
lie. This creates a conflict between moral norms and situational factors. Conversely, when
children are faced with whether to tell a white lie or a blue lie, children’s moral values
motivate them to tell a lie (to protect the individual or group), and the social–situational
factors also support them in telling a lie. This relation between moral norms and situ-
ational factors may explain why a relation is found between children’s evaluation of lies
and their behaviors when lying appears to serve prosocial purposes, but not when lying
is self-serving.

Conclusions

Since the initial observation of his son’s lies by Darwin, a great deal has been learned about
the development of children’s conception of lying, its moral implications, and actual lie-
telling behavior. Evidence to date strongly suggests that the development of the morality
of lying involves the integration of both intentionality and conventionality components.

Research has consistently demonstrated that children’s conceptual understanding of
lie telling begins at an early age. With regard to intentionality, while young preschoolers
begin defining a lie based on the factuality of a statement, older preschoolers and young
elementary school children begin to incorporate a speaker’s deceptive intention and be-
lief into their conception of lying. However, it is not until adolescence when deceptive
intention and belief become fully integrated into children’s mature conception of lying.

With regard to conventionality, whereas adults also allow their cultural and social con-
ventions to define whether an untruthful statement intentionally told to be deceptive is a
lie, children and adolescents from multiple cultures define untruthful statements to be lies
regardless of whether one’s culture sanctions such statements. The only exception is when
a false statement is sanctioned by a religious authority and when it is judged by children
from parochial schools.

Young children are also able to provide different moral evaluations for lying versus a
misdeed or truth and begin using the speaker’s intention to make such moral judgments
around 5 years of age. However, it still takes the next 5 or 6 years for children to reach the
mature level of moral judgments when they become capable considering making moral
judgments based on the belief states of the lie teller and the lie recipient (Wimmer et al.,
1984). Social–conventional rules also play an important role in shaping children’s evalu-
ation of lies. Both culture and social contexts in which a lie is told influence whether
children evaluate lies and truths more positively or negatively. Children from about 4
years of age onward judge white lies less negatively than malicious lies, and their moral
evaluations of white lies become increasingly less negative and truth telling increasingly
less positive. By adolescence, their moral judgments of white lies even become positively
rated. This developmental trend is true for both children from the North American and
Eastern Asian societies. For lies to be modest or to help a collective, children at the early
elementary school years tend to judge them negatively, but with increased age, their
moral judgments of such lies become increasingly less negative. By 11 to 12 years of age,
such judgments are generally positive. The opposite is true for truth telling, which shows immodesty or serves to undermine a collective’s interests. However, this developmental pattern is only true for children growing up in a collective society. Children growing up in a Western individualistic society positively rate truth telling to show one’s own achievement and good deeds, and negatively rate lie telling to conceal them. When an individual’s interest conflicts with that of a collective, children from the West judge lying or truth telling that enhances an individual’s interests more favorably than lying or truth telling that enhances a collective’s interests.

Both the intentionality and conventionality components also play an important role in the development of children’s actual lying behavior. Lying emerges early, around 2 years of age, and develops quickly. It reaches a rather sophisticated level around 6 to 7 years of age, but additional years enable children to hone their lying ability to a highly sophisticated level. One of the impetuses for the early rapid development is the development of the first-order theory of mind understanding, which allows children to appreciate that different individuals may have different intentions and beliefs, and one’s belief may not reflect the true state of affairs. This understanding helps children make decisions about whether to lie. With further development, children begin to acquire the second-order theory of mind understanding, which allows them to think recursively about intentions and beliefs. With this development, children also become more sophisticated in ensuring semantic leakage control, or making their initial lies consistent with subsequent statements. Children also use the social and conventional rules of a given context or culture in order to determine when to tell a lie and when not to tell a lie. As age increases, children become socialized to these rules and norms and are more likely to use them to guide their own lie-telling behaviors.

Recently, researchers have begun assessing the relation between children’s moral understanding of lie telling and their actual lie-telling behavior. It appears that when there is consistency between moral norms and social–situational factors, a relationship can be found between children’s moral understanding and behaviors. However, when there is a discrepancy between moral norms and the social–situational factors, the relation is no longer found. In such cases, the social–situational factors seem to override morality.

**Future Directions**

Although we have learned a great deal about the development of lying in children, many questions remain unanswered. One major issue concerns the role of theory of mind in children’s conception and moral judgment of lying. It is clear that intentionality plays a significant role in the development of children’s conception and moral judgment of lying. This is evidenced by gradual integration of deceptive intention and belief in children’s definition of a lie and their moral judgments. As intention and belief are fundamental components of a theory of mind, children’s theory of mind understanding ought to play an important role in the development of the concepts and moral judgments of lying. Although this idea has been explored in other moral domains with promising results (Kil- len, Mulvey, Richardson, Jampol, & Woodword, 2011; Smetana, Jambon, Conry-Murry, & Sturge-Apple, 2011), researchers have yet to directly examine the relation between children’s first- and second-order theory of mind understanding and their conception and moral judgment of lying.
The second outstanding issue is how children’s conceptions and evaluations of different types of lies are related. To date, most of the moral understanding studies have compared children’s moral understanding of malicious lies (lies told to harm) and lies to conceal one’s transgression with either white lies, or blue lies, or lies to be modest. No study has examined the extent to which children’s moral understandings are related to or different from these different types of lies in various social contexts. The same is true for lying behavior. In all lie-production studies, researchers tend to examine one type of lying exclusively without considering its relation to another type. Research on the development of these different types of lying will allow us to uncover the possible underlying mechanisms for children’s moral knowledge and moral behavior. It may shed light on the age-old question of whether there exists a consistent and constant honesty personality trait or whether children respond differentially according to different social contexts as prescribed by the so-called doctrine of specificity advocated by Hartshorne and May (1928).

The third highly significant, yet unexplored, issue is how the intentionality and conventionality components together influence the development of lying in children. To date, most of the studies on children’s moral understanding of lying and actual behaviors have mainly focused on one component while ignoring the other. For example, when researchers study the role of intentionality in children’s conception of lying, they hardly ever consider the role of conventionality. Similarly, when they study the role of conventionality, they hardly consider the role of intentionality. The same is true for the study of lying behavior. The issue of intentionality in the form of theory of mind understanding has been considered when investigating children’s lying to conceal their own transgression. However, theory of mind understanding has never been factored into the study of the telling of white lies and blue lies. Thus, it remains entirely unclear as to how intentionality and conventionality interact with one another in the development of lying. One possibility is that we rely on one component or the other and eventually learn to integrate the two. For example, we know that children begin to tell lies around 2 to 3 years of age (Evans & Lee, 2013; Polak & Harris, 1999; Talwar & Lee, 2002a) but do not demonstrate an understanding of the role of deceptive intent in verbal deception until a few years later. Although children do not have an understanding of how lies impact the mind, they may use their knowledge of social conventions to determine when to tell a lie. Eventually, with increased cognitive capacity, children begin to understand beliefs and intentions and become more sophisticated lie tellers by integrating their understanding of intentionality with their understanding of the social convention (e.g., where, when, and how to tell a particular kind of lie). This integration of conventionality and intentionality in children’s understanding, evaluation, and production of lies may allow them to become sophisticated, versatile lie tellers and expert moral evaluators. The challenge in the near future is thus to systematically examine how this integration takes place in childhood, which will provide a comprehensive picture of the development of social pragmatics of lying in children.

References


Lying, Morality, and Development


Interrelations Between Theory of Mind and Morality
A Developmental Perspective

Kristin Hansen Lagattuta and Drika Weller

One central way to predict and explain human behavior is by attending to people’s minds; what they desire, intend, believe, think, and feel emotionally (Dennet, 1987; Wellman, 2011). Because such mentalizing is a ubiquitous part of everyday social interactions, a large focus of cognitive development research has been identifying developmental changes in children’s understanding of the mind, including their reasoning about interrelations between different kinds of mental states and between mind and behavior—what is known as a theory of mind (see Flavell, 2004). People's behaviors can also be predicted and explained in relation to social norms and moral rules. Because humans live in complex social groups, our decisions are also guided by the rules, obligations, and permissions sanctioned by our families and wider communities. There are certain actions that we should or should not do, things we have to or do not have to do, things we are permitted or not permitted to do, and decisions over which we have personal control or jurisdiction (e.g., Killen & Smetana, 1999; Nucci, 1996; Turiel, 2002). A large body of developmental research reveals significant advances in reasoning about morality, rules, and norms during childhood and adolescence as well (see Smetana, 2006).

Over the past 5 to 8 years, there has been growing empirical attention directed to building bridges between these two, often independent lines of research. This review summarizes key advances in theory-of-mind research as it relates to children’s understanding of morality. We start with children’s knowledge about intentions and motives, and then move to examine how children’s understanding of false belief, desires and emotions, and thoughts relate to their moral judgments and behavior. Next, we consider additional topics in theory of mind and morality including reasoning about apology, moral status, and trust in testimony. We then examine evidence of interrelations between theory of mind and morality from studies with children and adults with autism, a population known to have deficits in mental state understanding. We also summarize central findings from neuroscience research investigating the extent to which moral judgment and theory of mind tasks recruit overlapping versus independent neural regions. Finally, we discuss connections between children’s theory of mind, moral judgment, and behavior. Although we primarily focus on 3- to 10-year olds, we incorporate research with younger and older age groups as well.
Intentions and Moral Judgment

During the first year of life, infants begin to track other’s intentional, goal-directed actions (e.g., Leslie, 1994; Woodward & Sommerville, 2000). By 14 to 18 months, children can discriminate, at least on a basic level, between actions done “on purpose” versus “by accident” (Carpenter, Akhtar, & Tomasello, 1998), and they can recognize what a person is trying to do even when that person fails (Meltzoff, 1995). By the age of 3 years, children develop explicit knowledge about the distinction between intentional and unintentional behaviors, and they can further discriminate intentional behaviors from desires, mistakes, reflexes, and passive movements (Baird & Astington, 2004; Mull & Evans, 2010). Indeed, children’s understanding of intention is considered a critical cornerstone in the development of folk psychology because it is central for predicting and explaining behaviors (see Wellman, 2011). Intention is also a core feature of moral judgment, in that intentions are often criterial for evaluating the moral status of a person’s actions or character and for assigning blame or praise (Alicke & Rose, 2010). Not surprisingly, then, children’s and adults’ reasoning about intention–morality connections is the most widely studied topic in research bridging theory of mind and morality.

Piaget’s (1932) early tests of moral cognition involved presenting young children with scenarios in which a story character either causes minor harm when engaged in a prohibited action (e.g., breaks one dish when trying to sneak a cookie), or causes more severe harm when trying to be helpful (e.g., breaks three dishes when helping to set the table). Piaget documented that whereas young children typically judged the children’s “naughtiness” by the severity of the outcome, children older than 8 or 9 years of age focused on the child’s motives and intentions and judged the “cookie stealer” as more blameworthy even though he caused less damage. Piaget argued from these results that children transition from an objective (focus on severity of the crime) to a subjective view of moral responsibility (focus on intentions).

Piaget’s findings motivated numerous investigations into children’s developing ability to integrate intention, motive, and outcome information to make moral judgments. Here, we are using intention to indicate whether an action is done on purpose versus accidentally. Motive refers to the reason for why the actor engaged in the action (see Malle, 1999). Thus, two people can intentionally throw a ball; however, one may have a motive to harm and the other to play a game. These further studies have shown that children as young as 3 to 5 years can base culpability judgments on intention or motive information as long as outcome severity is held constant. For example, even preschoolers view negative actions that are carried out on purpose as more blameworthy than the same negative outcomes caused by accident (Karniol, 1978; Núñez & Harris, 1998; Siegal & Peterson, 1998; Yuill & Perner, 1988; Zelazo, Helwig, & Lau, 1996). As children grow older, they develop more sophisticated insight into relations between intentions, desires, motives, and beliefs. For example, Yuill (1984) found that 7-year olds, but not younger children, evaluated characters more favorably when they had good versus bad motives for the same intentional action regardless of the outcome. Younger children, in contrast, only distinguished between good and bad motives in their moral judgments when the valence of the character’s motive matched the outcome (e.g., a good motive causing a positive outcome).

Not only do children and adults use information about an actor’s intentions to make moral judgments (from theory of mind to morality), but the reverse also appears true:
Children’s and adults’ moral judgments impact their intuitions about the mental states of the actor (from morality to theory of mind). Using a between-subjects design, Knobe (2003) presented adults with scenarios in which a chairman receives information that if he starts a new program it will increase his company’s profits but it will also harm (or help) the environment. The chairman states that he “doesn’t care” about harming (or helping) the environment; he just wants to maximize profits. He decides to start the new program, and the environment is harmed (or helped). When adults are asked whether the chairman intentionally harmed or helped the environment, there is asymmetry in their responses. Harming the environment is viewed as intentionally caused (85% participants), whereas helping is not (23%). This is known as the “side-effect effect,” and it has been replicated several times and in multiple countries and languages (see Knobe, 2010).

Leslie, Knobe, and Cohen (2006) modified this paradigm to make it accessible to 3- to 5-year olds. In their scenarios a child wants to take a pet to a friend’s house. He knows that the pet will make the friend sad (or happy), but he doesn’t care. He brings the pet, and the friend gets sad (or happy). Evidence for the asymmetric side-effect effect appeared by age 4: Children more often judged that the character made the friend upset “on purpose” than made the friend happy “on purpose.” Most 3-year olds misreported that the character did actually care about his friend’s feelings, and they judged that both positive and negative outcomes had been done intentionally. Because this study did not involve older age groups, it is unknown whether the side-effect effect magnifies between childhood and adulthood. Compared with the adult findings (Knobe, 2003), it appears as though it does. Leslie et al. (2006) found that the difference was 60% (negative on purpose) compared to 40% (positive on purpose) at age 4, which notably, is at chance level. At age 5, it was 70% versus 30%, which was lower for the “on purpose” negative judgments and higher for the “on purpose” positive judgments compared to how adults responded to parallel tasks (Knobe, 2003).

Numerous theories have been proposed to explain these asymmetries in intention attribution (see Knobe, 2010, plus extended commentaries). Here, we focus on interpretations that help elucidate the developmental findings as well. Children and adults generally believe that human nature is inherently prosocial, with this assumption possibly emerging early in infancy (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2010). For example, when asked to predict whether a character will expect an unfamiliar person to engage in a positive or negative future action, 4- to 10-year olds and adults anticipate positive outcomes at above-chance levels (Lagattuta & Sayfan, 2011). This assumption that most people will act in socially normative ways increases the signal value of negative behaviors; antisocial actions are viewed as more revealing of character (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1999). Negative and positive moral obligations are also not structurally parallel: Adults and young children view negative duties (refraining from harming others) as much more obligatory than positive duties (helping others in need) (Kahn, 1992; Weller & Lagattuta, 2013). Thus, a “not caring” attitude about causing harm is more unusual, socially deviant, and reprehensible than a “not caring” attitude about a positive side effect of one’s actions (see Alicke & Rose, 2010). More broadly, children (Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002) and adults (Weiner, 1985) also more often seek to explain causes of negative events or emotions than positive outcomes. Based on these findings, it follows that the trials that elicited the highest attributions of intentionality combined negative outcomes and deviant attitudes versus positive outcomes and more normative attitudes.
Returning to the developmental story, studies have shown that the diagnostic value of social deviance changes with age. Children 7 years and older and adults view negative versus positive behaviors as being more diagnostic of a person’s character, and they assume greater consistency in people’s negative versus positive behaviors over time (Fiske, 2000; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989; Tversky & Kahneman, 1991; Ybarra, 2002). In contrast, younger children assume more consistency in positive versus negative behaviors, require more instances of negative versus positive behaviors to make character attributions, and expect people’s negative behaviors to improve over time (Heyman & Giles, 2004; Lockhart, Chang, & Story, 2002). In recent work, Lagattuta and Sayfan (2013) found that between the ages of 4 and 10 and between childhood and adulthood, there are increasing asymmetries in how children evaluate information about an agent’s prior antisocial versus prosocial behavior to make future-oriented predictions. Participants’ eye movement patterns and verbal judgments indicated that as children grow older, they more heavily weight evidence of an actor’s past harmful versus helpful behaviors when making future forecasts, especially in cases where the most recent past was negative. Combined, these data help explain why 3-year olds in Leslie et al. (2006) had difficulty acknowledging that characters did “not care” about causing harm (i.e., 3-year olds defaulted to the normative viewpoint of caring about harm) as well as why the side-effect effect appears to strengthen as children grow older (i.e., the signal value of deviance increases). Although the “facts” are structurally parallel in the harm and help scenarios (don’t care about X, X happens), their meaning in relation to folk psychological beliefs are not.

**False Belief and Moral Judgment**

Research on false belief understanding, or children’s knowledge that the mind can misrepresent reality, has dominated theory of mind research since Wimmer and Perner (1983) first reported that children younger than 4 to 5 years of age typically predict that a person will search for an object where it really is versus where he or she (falsely) believes it to be. A meta-analysis of more than 500 false belief studies revealed that despite variations in characters, content, and questioning, between the ages of 2.5 and 5 years, children go from consistently failing false belief tasks to consistently passing them (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001). These data have been taken as evidence that between the ages of 3 and 5 children transition from viewing the mind and the world as one and the same (that the mind accurately copies reality), to a new conceptual awareness that the mind and world are separate.

Given the centrality of false belief to a mature understanding of mind, researchers have recently examined connections between children’s understanding of false belief and their moral judgments. For example, Pellizzoni, Siegal, & Surian (2009) replicated Leslie et al.’s (2006) asymmetrical side-effect effect in 4- and 5-year olds when the focal character was described as “knowing but not caring” or just “knowing” about the side effect but choosing to engage in the action anyway. That is, in these conditions, negative outcomes were viewed as more intentional. Yet, when the character held a false belief about the preferences of the peer (e.g., he believed the friend’s reaction to seeing a gerbil would be positive, but in fact it was negative), children judged neither negative nor positive outcomes as intentionally caused. Still, the negative outcomes in these scenarios were...
mild (e.g., making a friend upset because she hates gerbils). Potentially, had the negative outcome been more extreme—the gerbil causes injury to the friend—the action may have been viewed as more intentional despite the false belief. Indeed, hindsight bias studies indicate that the more severe the negative outcome, the more adults view the event as having been foreseeable and preventable (see Harley, 2007, for a review).

A further way to examine relations between false belief understanding and moral judgment is to consider situations where a character unknowingly breaks a rule. Kalish and Cornelius (2007) presented 4- to 8-year olds and adults with scenarios featuring a protagonist who is absent from school when a rule is changed (e.g., the show-and-tell toys now belong in the lockers instead of in the box). The key question is whether participants recognize the divergence between what the characters should do and what they think they should do. Results showed that only children 7 years and older and adults made a clear distinction between obligation and belief. Younger children typically erred by judging that the protagonist would follow the new rule even without being informed of the rule change. Yet, despite being able to identify the characters’ false beliefs, 7-year olds still predicted, as with younger children, that teachers would punish the unknowing transgressors. This surprising result for the older children may result from the fact that children likely have observed teachers reprimanding students for breaking rules even when these breaches are caused unintentionally (see Dixon & Moore, 1990, for “harshness effect” in children’s judgments). Wang, Zhu, and Shi (2011) replicated the finding that 3- to 5-year olds frequently judge that characters will follow the rules even if they are unaware of these rules. These authors further reported that 7-year olds judged that unknowing rule breakers should not be punished (they did not ask the would question); however, younger preschoolers did not vary punishment evaluations in accord with the protagonist’s belief.

Killen and colleagues (2011) extended this inquiry from social conventions to moral rules by examining 3- to 7-year olds’ judgments about intention and blame when a protagonist knowingly versus unknowingly destroys a classmate’s possession (e.g., throws a lunch bag containing her special cupcake in the trash). Results showed that 7-year olds more often judged that the actor had a false belief about the bag's contents (e.g., thought it was trash) compared to younger children. Children who attributed a false belief to the accidental transgressor evaluated him or her as having more positive intentions and being less blameworthy than a knowledgeable transgressor. In contrast, children who failed to appreciate the accidental transgressor’s false belief did not make these distinctions in their intention and blame judgments. Additional findings revealed that 5- to 6-year olds who attributed positive or neutral intentions to the accidental transgressor still evaluated the act as wrong. It was not until 7 to 8 years of age that the majority of children both attributed positive intentions and viewed the act as “all right” (a mistake). This tendency of young children to believe that the accidental transgressor knowingly caused harm resonates with Kalish and Cornelius’s (2007) and Wang et al.’s (2011) finding that 3- to 5-year olds often claim that ignorant characters will follow rules despite having no knowledge of these rules.

Together, these data strongly suggest that understanding false belief in morally relevant or normative situations is more complex than in rule-free contexts. That is, whereas the typical passing age for standard false belief tasks is about 4 to 5 years of age (see Wellman et al., 2001), it is closer to 7 years of age when the false belief has moral
implications. Still, there may be an important qualification to this argument—this may only be the case when children evaluate situations involving unknowing rule violations. Clément, Bernard, and Kaufmann (2011) report that 3-year olds pass false belief tasks significantly more often when the character originally places the object in the location where the rule says it must go (e.g., dolls must be put in the toy box) versus the more standard task description (X places the doll in the toy box). These new findings suggest that being “right” from a moral or socially normative standpoint may even be more central to young children’s thinking about belief than being “right” factually. An untested condition that would add insight is whether the false belief task becomes more difficult if the original placement of the item breaks the rule and the real location (where the item was moved in the character’s absence) corrects this transgression. Clearly, there is more to be learned.

In addition to creating false belief tasks that have morally relevant features, researchers have also tested relations between children’s false belief understanding and their moral judgments. For example, Baird and Astington (2004) documented a significant relationship between children’s performance on standard false belief tasks and their ability to integrate intention and motive information in morally relevant situations, even when controlling for child age. Dunn, Cutting, and Demetriou (2000) found that children with stronger understanding of false belief focused more on psychological states when explaining their moral judgments, even when controlling for verbal IQ and narrative skill. Children higher in theory of mind skills are also typically rated lower in physically aggressive or antisocial behaviors (Capage & Watson, 2001); yet, negative relationships have also been found. Notably, ringleader bullies, who often use indirect aggression to manipulate others’ beliefs and emotions, often have sophisticated mental state understanding (Gasser & Keller, 2009; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999).

Doing What You Want Versus What You Should

By the age of 2 to 3 years, children demonstrate explicit understanding of prototypical connections between desires and emotions: Getting what you want makes you feel good, and not getting what you want makes you feel bad (Stein & Levine, 1989; Wellman & Woolley, 1990). This understanding is an important advance in early theory of mind because it reveals appreciation that people’s emotions are not determined just by objective situations but rather by the meaning the event has for an individual with respect to his or her mental states (i.e., Did the person want this to happen?). Problems arise, however, when this “desire psychology” conflicts with rules and norms. An important question, then, is when do children recognize that getting what you want (but breaking a rule) can feel bad and not getting what you want (but following a rule) can feel good? Understanding these desire–emotion connections likely poses a significant challenge to young children because they directly oppose early learned, canonical connections between desires and emotions.

Reasoning About Emotions in Desire–Rule Conflict Situations

Several studies have documented a phenomenon known as the “happy victimizer” effect: Children under 7 years of age show clear understanding that breaking moral rules
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is wrong, but they still frequently judge that obtaining goals by victimizing others “feels good” (see Arsenio, Adams, & Gold, 2006). Researchers have traditionally interpreted these findings to indicate that children under age 7 fail to consider the victim’s negative emotions when evaluating the emotions of the victimizer. Lagattuta (2005), however, replicated these same age trends in scenarios in which characters broke safety rules, rules about living routines, and rules about property rights. Between 4 and 7 years of age, children also increasingly understand that exerting willpower to abide by rules can feel good despite desire inhibition. Analyses of emotion explanations revealed that these age differences in emotion predictions were accompanied by increasing integration of rule- and future-oriented perspectives in children’s emotion explanations. Children 4 to 5 years old overwhelmingly explained emotions in relation to desire fulfillment alone (e.g., “She feels good because she got what she wanted”). Children who more frequently referred to rules or future consequences when explaining emotions more often attributed negative emotions to rule breakers and positive emotions to rule abiders. These findings show that the happy “rule breaker” effect is not specific to moral infractions (i.e., it applies to a wide range of rule situations, and young children also exhibit a “sad rule abider” effect); rather, it reflects children’s broader difficulty in coordinating their understanding of theory of mind with their reasoning about morality and norms.

Additional experimental conditions suggest that there may be more flexibility in young children’s reasoning about relations between desires and rules than previously assumed. For example, 4- to 5-year olds more frequently explain emotions in relation to rules or future consequences when they are presented with characters in desire–rule conflict situations whose emotions mismatch desire fulfillment (e.g., feeling bad after running into the street to get a desired ball; Lagattuta, 2005). If 4- and 5-year olds are explicitly told that characters are thinking about rules or future consequences after making willpower or transgression decisions (a perspective they rarely infer spontaneously), they can demonstrate strong understanding that transgression feels bad and willpower feels good on par with adults (Lagattuta, 2008). Moreover, 4- to 5-year olds demonstrate clear knowledge that getting what one wants by breaking a rule feels worse than simply getting what one wants and that inhibiting desires to abide by rules feels better than simply not getting what one wants (Lagattuta, 2005; Weller & Lagattuta, 2013). These data reveal that young children have some sensitivity to the presence of rules when thinking about desire–emotion connections but that it is not until 7 years of age that they are fully capable of integrating desire and rule perspectives without primes or prompts.

Reasoning About Decisions in Desire–Rule Conflict Situations

A further question about desires and morality involves predicting people’s behavior. In situations where desires conflict with rules, do children believe that desires trump rules or rules trump desires? Kalish and Shiverick (2004) presented 5- and 8-year olds and adults with situations where a character’s preferences (what he or she likes to do) conflicted with a rule (they used novel-label rules, such as “Johnny likes to flimmer. The rule is not to flimmer”). The general pattern across all age groups was that characters will do what they like to do, will feel happy doing what they like to do, but they should follow the rule (although 5-year olds more often judged that characters would follow rules and would
feel happy to do so compared to older children and adults. Lagattuta, Nucci, and Bosacki (2010) presented 4- to 8-year olds with scenarios in which a character’s immediate desires conflicted with a parental rule. For some trials, the rule involved moral concerns (should not cause harm to others), whereas others involved rules that impinged on what children generally think of as the “personal domain” (should not wear certain clothes, play with certain friends, or engage in certain artistic or sporting activities; see Nucci, 1996). Although there was a significant increase between 4 and 7 years of age in predicting that people will follow rules and feel good about doing so for the trials featuring moral rules, all age groups rarely predicted “compliance + feel good” for personal rule trials, especially when parents forbade fulfilling desires essential to the character’s identity. This was the case even though all age groups stated that it was “not OK” to break these rules. These findings highlight the necessity of specifying the domain of the rule (e.g., moral, social convention, personal) when investigating how children learn to integrate theory of mind and morality.

**Sacrificing Personal Desires to Help Others**

A further way to investigate children’s reasoning about connections between desire and morality is to examine how they respond to dilemmas in which the desires of a protagonist are pitted against the needs of another person—situations in which the character must sacrifice his or her own needs to show compassion or altruism toward another. Here, we focus on research on children’s prosocial judgment, highlighting how these findings also provide important insight into connections between theory of mind and morality.

Research examining children’s prosocial moral reasoning typically involves presenting children with moral dilemmas in which a focal character must make a personal sacrifice to help another person in need (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979; Kahn, 1992; Kochanska, 1991; Nunner-Winkler, 2007). A common prosocial dilemma runs as follows: A young woman who is a swimming expert must decide whether to help disabled children learn to swim or practice for an important swimming contest that could win her a college scholarship. Children are asked what the young woman should do and why. Results from multiple studies show that children exhibit increasingly more empathy and other-oriented perspective taking across the elementary school years, expecting less self-sacrifice when the cost of helping is high (e.g., missing several important practices and jeopardizing a scholarship to help a needy person) and more prosocial responses (decisions to sacrifice to help) when the cost of helping is low (e.g., missing only one practice to help a needy person) (e.g., Eisenberg & Shell, 1986; Kahn, 1992).

In recent years, there has been growing attention to children’s understanding of emotions and prosocial orientation. For example, Lane and colleagues (2010) found that children with higher emotion understanding and theory of mind skills at 3.5 years old were more prosocially orientated at 5.5 years of age when reasoning about people’s decisions in prosocial dilemmas. However, this effect was only present when children reasoned about the nonexpected response (decisions not to help). To better understand the characteristics of the situation that influence children’s decisions and emotions, Weller and Lagattuta (2012) created prosocial dilemmas in which the character’s desire, the level of sacrifice, the cost and incentives for helping, the relationship to the needy individual, the needy
individual’s responsibility for his or her predicament, and the needy child’s level of need were tightly controlled. They found that 5- to 13-year olds made different judgments based on the level of need (e.g., children felt more obligated to help in high versus low need) and that with increasing age children attributed more positive emotions to people who self-sacrificed to help another person. As with Lane and colleagues (2010), more complex developmental findings emerged when children reasoned about not helping others. Results indicated a U-shaped curve with 5-to 6-year olds and 11-to 13-year olds attributing the most positive emotions and 7-to 10-year olds the least positive emotions following decisions to ignore a needy person. Curvilinear developmental patterns have also been documented in related studies investigating how children and adolescents coordinate personal desires with the needs of others (e.g., Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy, & Van Court, 1995; Nucci, 2011; Smetana, Tasopoulos-Chan, Gettman, Villalobos, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2009).

Other research reveals that children and adolescents are influenced by the characteristics of the needy individual when reasoning about prosocial dilemmas. For example, Killen and Turiel (1998) report that adolescents and young adults judge that it is more important to help and morally worse not to help in dilemmas involving close (mother–child or husband–wife) versus distant relationships (a new friend or a former sibling-in-law). With increasing age, helping behavior was seen as less obligatory and more a matter of personal choice when distant relationships were involved. Weller and Lagattuta (2013) found that children and young adolescents judged that people would feel happier helping same-race versus other-race persons, happier ignoring the needs of other-race versus same-race persons, and less obliged to help other-race versus same-race needy people. Thus, when investigating children’s ability and motivation to reconcile personal desires with the competing needs of others, developmental patterns depend on the types of dilemmas, the people involved, and the kinds of questions posed. More systematic investigation into the factors that influence children’s reasoning about mental states, emotions, and morality in prosocial dilemmas is needed.

Reasoning About Apology, Assigning Moral Status, and Learning from Others

So far in this chapter we have examined how children learn to integrate information about people’s intentions, beliefs, desires, thoughts, and emotions when making moral judgments. Researchers have also explored broader aspects of developmental changes in children’s reasoning about psychological states in morally charged situations. Here, we focus on three intriguing topics connecting mind and morality: children’s reasoning about apology, children’s assignment of moral status, and how children’s moral evaluations may impact the way they acquire knowledge from others.

Children’s reasoning about guilt and apology provide an avenue for exploring their emerging concepts of how a wrongdoer’s expressions and words following harmful acts reflect his or her mental states and emotions, as well as influence the psychological states of the victim. Smith, Chen, and Harris (2010) presented 4- to 8-year olds with scenarios in which an actor harmed another person and either did or did not apologize. When the wrongdoer failed to apologize, children typically attributed “happy” or mixed feelings to
him or her and negative feelings to the victim (similar to the “happy victimizer” studies reviewed previously). In contrast, when the wrongdoer apologized, children rated him or her as experiencing more negative emotions and the victim as feeling more positively. Vaish and colleagues (2011) presented 4- to 5-year olds with videos of a transgressor who either did or did not display guilt (Experiment 1) or who did or did not apologize (Experiment 2). Five-year olds expressed more liking and desire to play with, and they distributed more resources to, remorseful versus unremorseful transgressors. Four-year olds only made these distinctions when the wrongdoer apologized. When asked to compare the moral character of remorseful versus unremorseful characters, both age groups evaluated unapologetic characters as “meaner.” Combined, these studies show that during the preschool years, children develop a basic grasp of how guilt displays and explicit apologies can function to appease victims and to restore relationships and moral standing—processes previously studied only in adults (e.g., Keltner, Young, & Buswell, 1997).

Numerous studies have shown that at least by 2 years of age, if not earlier, children attribute psychological states to humans as well as to nonhuman agents capable of goal-directed action (see Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). The question then is whether children’s understanding of mental states relates to their assignment of moral status to different groups. Beliefs about an individual’s or a group’s moral status affect ideas about what constitutes ethical and unethical treatment (e.g., beliefs about ownership, control, care, protection, rights), as well as one’s sense of moral obligation to help or not harm (see Warren, 1997). Olthoff and colleagues (2008) presented 9-, 11-, and 18-year olds with scenarios featuring a protagonist who caused physical harm to a novel creature. “Victims” varied by three criteria: capacity to suffer, perceptual abilities, and capacity to think. Children and adults rated the wrongness of the action. Results showed that 9-year olds only took into account the victim’s ability to suffer, 11-year olds differentiated scenarios by the capacity to suffer and perceptual abilities, and 18-year olds further discriminated by the entity’s ability to think. Thus, consideration of a victim’s capacity for higher-level cognition did not become criterial for evaluating the wrongness of harm until young adulthood. These data fit with previous research showing that children become more discriminating about the situations that call for moral action as they grow older (Killen, 2007; Smetana et al., 2009; Weller & Lagattuta, 2012), and they suggest that young children may potentially cast a wider net on which groups require protection and humane treatment than adolescents and adults. Further research examining children’s explanations for their judgments would help elucidate reasons for these age-related differences.

Another way to examine interconnections between morality and theory of mind is to investigate whether children vary in their willingness to acquire knowledge from another person based on that person’s moral character. A growing area of cognitive development research focuses on how children learn from the testimony of others, including whether they are more likely to trust information (e.g., new words, facts about science or religion) provided by some speakers over others. For example, Koenig and Harris (2005) found that preschoolers more often learn a new label for an object from a previously accurate (previously provided correct labels for known objects) versus inaccurate speaker (previously provided inaccurate labels). Recently, Mascaro and Sperber (2009) examined whether preschoolers also differentiate the credibility of a speaker’s testimony by evidence of their moral character. Three-year olds were shown a “mean” puppet (a puppet who hits the
other puppet) and a “kind” puppet (a puppet that strokes or pets the other puppet). Both puppets had perceptual access to a hidden object. The researchers found that 3-year olds more often accepted the testimony about the hidden object’s identity provided by the kind puppet, even though both puppets were equally knowledgeable. An interesting additional condition, not included in this study, would be to see whether evaluations of “niceness” could even trump knowledge or expertise. That is, would young children choose to take information or advice from an inaccurate but nice speaker over an accurate by previously mean speaker? Notably, these data have implications for children’s learning in school settings. In traditional classrooms, children are expected to learn from a teacher’s testimony (e.g., instructions and facts). Children’s evaluations of teachers as “mean” or “nice” may impact their motivation and capacity to learn (see Lagattuta, Hjortsvang, & Kennedy, in press).

Evidence From Atypical Populations

Further insight into connections between theory of mind and morality can be found by examining atypical populations. Investigation of moral reasoning in children and adults with developmental disorders characterized by social difficulties (e.g., autism) or with perceptual impairments that restrict their ability to immerse fully in the social world (e.g., deafness) can contribute to methods, theory, and interpretations of findings with typical populations. Developmental theory and the study of psychopathology are reciprocally informative (Burack, Iarocci, Bowler, & Mottron, 2002).

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder marked by impairments in language and imagination; repetitive, stereotyped behaviors; and problems with social relatedness (Frith, 2003). Children with autism typically fail, or show extreme delays in, tasks that require reasoning about mental states compared to normal controls and children with other developmental disorders (e.g., Down Syndrome) matched in mental age (Baron-Cohen, Leslie, & Frith, 1986; Peterson & Siegal, 2000; Peterson, Wellman, & Liu, 2005). These deficits are not only apparent on experimental tasks but also in their everyday conversations. Talk about mental states is notably diminished or entirely lacking (Tager-Flusberg, 1992). Moreover, children and adults with autism also demonstrate some difficulty understanding and appropriately responding to people’s emotions, and they exhibit diminished empathic responses to others in distress (see Begeer et al., 2008, for a review). Thus, investigation into the moral judgments and reasoning of individuals with autism may provide important clues as to the relationship between psychological understanding and morality.

Although this research is somewhat limited in scope, the emerging consensus indicates that basic moral awareness is spared in autism and therefore does not require advanced skills in deciphering motives, beliefs, and intentions. For example, Blair (1996) found that school-aged children with autism who failed a standard false belief task still differentiated between moral rules and social conventions; a distinction that typically developing 3-year olds can also make (see Smetana, 1985). In a related study, Leslie, Mallon, and DiCorkia (2006) showed intact ability in children with autism (aged 7 years and older) to judge bad acts as “bad” and deserving of punishment and good acts “good” and deserving of praise, to make basic distinctions between violations of moral and conventional rules, and to differentiate between the distress of a “crybaby” (a child crying for no just cause) and the distress of a victim. Similar to Blair (1996), these competencies did not correlate with
performance on a false belief task. Grant, Boucher, Riggs, and Grayson (2005) further showed that adolescents with autism did not differ from typically developing 8-year olds in the assignment of culpability to characters with “good” versus “bad” motives when the outcome was held constant (i.e., they had to determine which child was “naughtier” in a paired comparison).

Before making strong conclusions, it is important to stress some limitations and caveats. First, most prior studies have tested a select subsample of high functioning individuals with autism who have normal or above normal intelligence. This population may be applying more black-and-white rules to logic through these tasks (e.g., “Don’t do X”), potentially resulting in more rigid moral evaluations (Channon et al., 2010; Frith, 2003). Second, studies showing proficient moral reasoning in children with autism have investigated basic awareness of moral and normative rules and negative versus positive intentions. Knowledge about desires and intentions has been shown to be intact in children and adults with autism (Carpenter, Pennington, & Rogers, 2001; Russell & Hill, 2001). Studies using more complex moral reasoning tasks that require tracking and integrating multiple mental states (e.g., foreseeability, intentions, and beliefs) and outcome types (e.g., type and severity of harm or benefit) show significant impairments in children and adults with autism (e.g., Moran et al., 2011). Indeed, in the previously cited study by Grant and colleagues (2005), adolescents with autism performed worse than typical controls when trials varied by outcome and motive information, and they also exhibited severe difficulty explaining their moral judgments.

It would also be interesting to examine relationships between theory of mind and morality in other atypical populations. For example, studies show that deaf children raised by hearing parents exhibit profound delays in their understanding of mind—it is not until age 12 that these late-signing deaf children typically pass false belief tasks at a rate comparable to normal 4-year olds (Peterson, Wellman, & Liu, 2005). In contrast, early-signing deaf children, children growing up in a family with a fluent-signing deaf parent, demonstrate no delays in theory of mind understanding (Peterson & Siegal, 2000; Peterson et al., 2005). Hearing parents of deaf children rarely initiate causal–explanatory conversations about mental states, emotions, and actions. Instead, most conversations between deaf children and hearing parents focus on daily living routines and immediately perceptible objects and events (Vaccari & Marschark, 1997). Although evidence is scarce and studies have not adequately controlled for family language environment, findings suggest that deaf children have delays in classic moral judgment tasks compared to same-aged hearing children (e.g., Piagetian moral judgment tasks), but by age 12 these differences are small or nonexistent (Arnold, 1993; Nass, 1964). To our knowledge, connections between theory of mind and morality have not been studied in this population.

Evidence From Neuroscience

Research exploring the neurological bases of morality, particularly connections between morality and theory of mind, has exploded in recent years. Here, the key question involves the extent to which brain areas recruited when making moral evaluations overlap with those known to be related to reasoning about mental states. Evidence of significant overlap is interpreted as indication of the interdependence of theory of mind and morality, whereas
lack of overlap is interpreted as independence. Since the bulk of this work has been done with adolescent and adult populations, the developmental story is limited.

Functional neuroimaging (fMRI) studies with adults have identified a network of brain regions involved in reasoning about mental states. These regions include the right and left temporo-parietal junction (LTPJ, RTPJ), the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC), the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (vmPFC), the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dLPFC), the superior temporal sulcus (STS), the posterior cingulated gyrus (PCG), the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), the precuneous (PC), and the amygdala, with different types of theory of mind tasks (desires, beliefs, intentions, emotions) utilizing distinct neural regions within this network (Baron-Cohen et al., 2000; Gallagher & Frith, 2003; Saxe & Powell, 2006; Saxe & Wexler, 2005). Developmental studies using event-related potentials (ERP) have shown some converging evidence (see Liu, Sabbagh, Gehrig, & Wellman, 2004), with more localized activation, similar to adult patterns, evident in children knowledgeable about false belief (see Sabbagh et al., 2009).

Several studies have documented that when adults evaluate the moral status of an actor's behaviors, brain areas known to be involved in mental state reasoning (see above) are recruited when encoding the actor's mental state, when considering the impact of an actor's actions on other people, and when integrating mental state and outcome information to make a moral judgment (Decety & Howard, this volume; Young & Saxe, 2009). Mental state networks appear particularly activated when evaluating acts of intentional harm (see Decety & Michalska, 2010; Decety, Michalska, & Kinzler, 2011), assigning blame for negative outcomes, or reasoning about attempted harm in comparison to thinking about situations involving neutral intent or outcomes (Young, Scholz, & Saxe, 2011). This greater activation in brain areas associated with theory of mind when adults think about negative outcomes is intriguing in light of the side-effect effect studies reviewed earlier (Knobe, 2004; Leslie et al., 2006). That is, these neuroscience data support the view that people are more likely to consider a person's mental states in situations involving actual or potential harm versus neutral or positive consequences.

As with studies examining the neural correlates of theory of mind, the particular brain regions involved in moral judgment can vary by the specific task (see the articles cited above for further details). For example, hypothetical moral scenarios involving “personal dilemmas” (physically hurting or killing a person for the benefit of a group, the classic “footbridge scenario”) recruit more emotional areas of the brain compared to “impersonal dilemmas” (turning a switch to hurt or kill a person to benefit a group; the classic “trolley scenario”), which involve more frontal areas (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001; Hauser, Cushman, Young, Jin, & Mikhail, 2007). There also appears to be a developmental shift between childhood and adulthood from a more visceral empathic response to viewing others in distress (activation of the amygdala and OFC) to a more frontal function reliant on the PFC, but still involving emotional areas as well (see Decety, 2010). These data suggest that affective arousal—evaluating something as good/bad, hostile/benign, threatening/nurturing—as well as empathic reactions to the distress of others—may be primary in the integration of moral cognition and theory of mind. As children's knowledge about mental states becomes more sophisticated, these connections likely expand to more thorough considerations of desires, intentions, and beliefs, and increasingly involve more frontal areas of the brain (see also Decety et al., 2011). These
neuroscience data corroborate behavioral evidence for dual process theories arguing that moral judgments involve both emotions and controlled cognition (Greene, 2009).

More broadly, findings from neuroscience indicate that moral judgment requires the interaction of multiple cognitive processes, including a substantial overlap to neural regions identified as central to theory of mind and emotion processing (see also Greene, 2003). This is not to say that the theory of mind regions are domain-specific either; many of these regions are also related to working memory, executive control, episodic memory, prospection, outcome probability, utilitarian decisions, and thinking about unexpected outcomes (Knutson & Peterson, 2005; Miller & Cohen, 2001; Schacter, Addis, & Buckner, 2007). Thus, observed relations between theory of mind and moral cognition may in part be due to their overlapping reliance on executive control processes in the prefrontal cortex. Indeed, individual differences in executive control predict children’s performance on false belief tasks (e.g., Carlson & Moses, 2001; Hughes & Ensor, 2007). Implementing theory of mind knowledge also requires controlled cognitive processes in later childhood and adulthood (Lagattuta, Sayfan, & Blattman, 2010; Samson & Apperly, 2010). On the morality side, deficits in executive control have been linked to conduct disorder (Moffitt, 1993) and psychopathy (O’Brien & Frick, 1996), whereas strengths correlate positively with empathy (Rothbart, Ahadi, & Hershey, 1994) and prosocial judgments (Kochanska, Murray, & Coy, 1997; Lane et al., 2010). As research continues to advance, more complex models of the neural bases of theory of mind and morality will emerge, including contributions of more domain-general cognitive processes such as executive control.

Connections Among Theory of Mind, Moral Cognition, and Moral Behavior

A discussion of theory of mind and morality would be incomplete without attention directed toward whether children’s understanding of psychological states, social norms, and morality converge to promote moral action. Recent behavioral studies (Eisenberg & Eggum, 2009; Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006) and neuroscience research (see previous section) show that emotion understanding and emotional responsiveness are critical for moral behavior. As argued by Decety (2010, p. 257), “Empathy-related responding, including caring and empathic concern, is thought to motivate prosocial behavior, inhibit aggression, and pave the way to moral reasoning.”

Children first begin to exhibit empathy (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992) and instrumental helping behaviors (Warneken & Tomasello, 2009), starting around 18 months of age, coinciding with their developing understanding that other people can have preferences and emotions that differ from their own (Repacholi & Gopnik, 1997). During the second and third years of life, children increasingly show emotional discomfort after wrongdoings (displays of guilt and shame), concern about reparations, and heightened attention to other’s transgressions (see Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007). As children grow older, they develop more sophisticated understanding of causes and consequences of emotions, stronger awareness of individual differences in emotional reactions, and greater knowledge about connections between emotions, mental states, and actions (see Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006).

Several studies have documented positive relationships between children’s sympathy and empathy (as measured by physiological reactions, emotion expressions, parent reports,
or self-reports) and their prosocial behaviors (see Eisenberg et al., 2006, for a review). For example, Miller, Eisenberg, Fabes, and Shell (1996) found significant relations between young children’s empathy, moral reasoning, and altruistic behavior. In a recent longitudinal study, Eggum and colleagues (2011) found that 4- to 6-year olds’ emotion understanding and theory of mind were positively related to their prosocial behavior and sympathy. Researchers have also found significant links between children’s and adolescents’ moral behavior and their emotion attributions to story characters that victimize others (see Arsenio et al., 2006). Children who more often attribute negative emotions to actors who violate moral rules engage in more prosocial behavior (rated by mothers and teachers), as well as share more resources with unfamiliar children in a laboratory setting (Gummerum, Hanoch, Keller, Parsons, & Hummel, 2010; Malti, Gummerum, & Buchmann, 2007; Malti, Gasser, & Buchmann, 2009). In contrast, aggressive children and adolescents are more likely to report feeling happy after moral transgressions in comparison to nonaggressive youth (Arsenio et al., 2006; Gasser & Keller, 2009; Krettenauer & Eichler, 2006; Malti et al., 2009).

Previous research offers conflicting evidence about whether first- versus third-person judgments are more predictive of children’s moral behaviors. Some studies have found that first-person emotion attributions (reasoning about the self) are more closely linked to children’s actions, whereas others show that children’s third-person emotion judgments are equally good in predicting moral behavior (see Arsenio et al., 2006; Gasser & Keller, 2009; Gummerum et al., 2010; Krettenauer, Malti, Sokol, 2008; Malti et al., 2009). Evidence suggests that first-person emotion attributions may be particularly useful for revealing younger but not necessarily older children’s moral behavior (e.g., Malti et al., 2009). With increasing age, children’s theory of mind skills improve (e.g., Carpendale & Chandler, 1996), as well as their desire to present themselves in more socially desirable ways (see Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007), potentially leading to more censored first-person responses. When dealing with sensitive topics (e.g., moral dilemmas involving race relations), third-person reasoning may provide a more effective measure (see Weller & Lagattuta, 2013). Future research that more systematically compares children’s and adolescents’ responses to first- versus third-person questioning techniques across a wide variety of morally provocative situations is needed.

Concluding Thoughts

Developmental research, studies with atypical populations, and neuroscience findings converge to reveal significant interrelations between theory of mind and morality. How children and adults construe people’s behaviors in relation to desires, intentions, beliefs, and emotions influence their moral evaluations, including how they assign blame or allocate praise. Children’s and adults’ moral cognition also guides their inferences about people’s actions, dispositions, and mental states. We are in agreement with Carpendale, Hammond, and Lewis (2010, p. 334) that “we make sense of our social world in moral terms because this is a fundamental aspect of our human form of life, involving coordinating our actions and interests with others.” That is, both theory of mind and moral cognition are inherently grounded in how we think about ourselves, other people, social relationships, and social groups. Thus, consideration of obligations, norms, and rules may be inseparable from
theory of mind (see also Wellman & Miller, 2008), with this integration likely strengthening as children develop more sophisticated knowledge about mind–morality connections, as well as more advanced executive control to coordinate these sometimes-conflicting perspectives (e.g., the tension between personal desires and social obligations).

Throughout our reviews of individual studies in this chapter, we have offered several suggestions for future research. We end here with three broader ideas. First, there are likely reciprocal or bidirectional relations between developing a theory of mind and learning about rules and norms. It would be important to identify more precisely how conceptual advances in understanding mental states feed off of and inform children’s understanding of morality (and vice versa) at different developmental time points. For example, Smetana and colleagues (2011) have recent data showing that 2.5- to 4-year olds who demonstrated awareness that moral transgressions were wrong independent of authority figures showed more advanced theory of mind 6 months later. Second, more empirical attention needs to be directed toward how individual differences in theory of mind and moral cognition relate to children’s actual behaviors. Knowledge about mental states and awareness of moral rules and norms are insufficient to promote moral action. There are likely several additional factors. For example, a person has to further identify and experience concern for other people’s emotions; be motivated to make decisions that will benefit others (even if it requires inhibiting personal desires); have the skills, resources, and regulatory control to carry out these decisions; and experience appropriate emotions after taking action (e.g., guilt following transgressions). More studies are needed to identify relationships among children’s actions, theory of mind, moral cognition, and emotional experiences in morally provocative situations.

A final question concerns the extent to which connections between theory of mind, moral cognition, and action are stronger in some circumstances over others. Adults greatly underestimate how much of their decisions and actions are influenced by situational features (e.g., Kelley, 1973) and social norms (see Jacobsen, Mortensen, & Cialdini, 2011) rather than by mental states and dispositions. Moreover, many judgments and behaviors are carried out automatically without deliberate forethought or controlled cognition, with “explanations” often provided post hoc (see Gigerenzer, Hertwig, & Pachur, 2011). Recent studies also show that adults do not always automatically track others’ mental states, and they have difficulty monitoring mental state information when they are under cognitive load (e.g., Lin, Keysar, & Epley, 2010). Because researchers have primarily examined connections between theory of mind and morality using hypothetical dilemmas that include mental state and outcome information or that involve salient conflicts between self-interest, rules, or the well-being of others, experimental findings may exaggerate the actual impact of theory of mind on people’s everyday moral judgments. Future studies are needed to examine more systematically the conditions in which children and adults are more versus less likely to consider people’s mental states when making moral judgments, as well as how often children and adults consider their own and others’ mental states and emotions prior to acting.

In closing, previous research has laid important groundwork for future scientific inquiry into connections between theory of mind and morality. The high number of recently published studies provides testament that this has become a very “hot” topic that has captured the fascination of developmental psychologists, social psychologists, neuroscientists,
and philosophers. This cross-cutting allure combined with multidisciplinary empirical approaches makes this area of research uniquely situated for having a major impact on how we think about both mind and morality.

Note
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Interrelations Between Theory of Mind and Morality


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Part VI

Precursors to Morality: Cognitive, Neurobiological, and Comparative Approaches
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There has been a remarkable increase in theory and research on the neurobiological foundations of empathy, sympathy, compassion, prosocial behavior, and altruism in recent years. In this chapter, we examine how empathic concern for others is connected to genetic, neurophysiological, hormonal, and autonomic physiological functioning. Neurobiological researchers take various positions on the extent to which empathy and related constructs are reflective of morality, precursors to morality, or fundamental building blocks of morality. Our position conforms to the latter view: Empathy is a primary motivational force for caring behaviors toward others in need (de Waal, 2008). As a basic, essential element of compassion, empathy forms the basis for the capacity to think and act with positive, care-oriented morality. We begin with a brief consideration of definitional and theoretical issues before turning to the exciting new insights arising from empirical research.

**Foundations for Examining the Neurobiology of Empathy**

Empathy is defined here as the recognition and sharing of another’s emotional state. Recognition entails cognitive empathy, or the capacity to comprehend another’s emotional state and understand another’s perspective. Shared emotional states reflect affective empathy, or vicarious affective arousal that might be similar to the other’s emotion. This is distinct from emotional contagion, a close matching of the other’s emotion, or personal distress, a self-focused aversive reaction to another’s distress or pain, in that affective empathy is a resonant emotion that is felt on behalf of the other person (Zahn–Waxler & Robinson, 1995). Closely related to empathy are sympathy and compassion, which reflect an orientation toward another’s distress or pain, feelings of sadness or concern on behalf of that person, and a desire to promote that person’s well-being. Prosocial behavior constitutes actions taken to benefit another’s well-being, including actions to alleviate their distress. Thus, the broad behavioral category of prosocial behavior can encompass altruism, which promotes another’s needs at some cost to oneself. These related affective, cognitive, and behavioral reactions all reflect, to some degree, expressions of empathic concern for the well-being of others (Hastings, Zahn–Waxler, Robinson, Usher, & Bridges, 2000).
Numerous theories have attempted to reconcile the apparent incompatibility of feeling and acting toward the well-being of others with the drive for individual survival and reproductive success emphasized by traditional evolutionary perspectives. According to kin selection processes, a network of genetically related individuals within a population will cooperate and engage in altruistic acts with one another and thereby increase the average genetic fitness of the network as a whole, even if such behavior reduces the individual fitness of certain members of the group (Wilson, 1978). With evolutionary pressure having selected for a propensity for cooperative or altruistic behaviors toward kin, one can expect that such behaviors would occasionally be directed toward unrelated others (West, El Mouden, & Gardner, 2011).

Some sociobiologists have suggested that altruism evolved through reciprocity (Trivers, 1971). Under certain conditions, natural selection favors altruistic behaviors because these actions eventually benefit the altruistic individual at a later time, through quid pro quo returns of the favor, or by increasing the benevolent actor's stature and status within the community (McAndrew, 2007). Others have argued that altruism among nongenetically related members of social species that live in group contexts (including humans) increases the odds of reproduction by the group and, thus, species survival (e.g., Rachlin, 2002; Sober & Wilson, 1998). A genetic propensity toward concern for others facilitates group cooperation, cohesion, and success against threats and challenges. Even if some altruistic individuals are personally disadvantaged by their own actions, as the group thrives and grows, the genetic basis for compassion and helping also is perpetuated.

MacLean (1985) proposed that evolutionary changes in the brain associated with the development of family related behaviors, such as affiliation, nurturance, and responsibility for others, established the capacity for empathy. Interconnections between limbic regions responsible for affective states conducive to sociability and later-evolving prefrontal regions, which enable such functions as anticipation, planning, and perspective taking made it possible for affect (associated with family related, caregiving functions) to be experienced in combination with cognitive insight into others (Tucker, Luu, & Derryberry, 2005). In this view, familial groups were the contexts within which evolutionary forces acted on mammalian neurophysiology and human neuropsychology, with the capacity for empathy evolving from natural selection pressure for long-term parental care of offspring among mammals. Parental perception of and responses to their infants’ cues of hunger, pain, and distress both meets infants’ immediate needs and models or reinforces the infants’ developing caregiving behavioral system (Mikulciner & Shaver, 2005).

Functional theories of emotion extend these lines of reasoning further. Emotions are the neural representations of the relations between the self and evoking stimuli, as manifested through automatic and stereotypic changes in arousal states and connections of brain systems, and their impact on autonomic and somatic activity (Damasio, 2000). Preston and de Waal (2002) argued that, in the case of empathy, perceiving another’s emotional experience activates a representation of the other, its state, and its situation. This activation primes the perceiver to act upon its awareness of the other’s state and situation. Empathy, sympathy, and prosocial behavior, therefore, arise from the evolution of basic emotion processes within the salient mammalian niche of extended parental care for offspring. These affective capacities would extend into another salient niche of mammalian social species: repeated interactions with familiar, nonfamilial members of the social group. With
expectations for future interactions in an enduring social group, gratitude for help (Mc-Cullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008) and forgiveness for transgressions (Gold & Davis, 2005) have been proposed as emotional motivators of altruism that serve to maintain group harmony.

Research on the Biological Bases of Empathy

These theoretical perspectives put the roots of human empathy in our biology. In the balance of this chapter, we review of the evidence for this proposal from studies of human neurobiology. Three central themes emerged repeatedly in our review: definition and measurement, levels of analysis, and development. Framed as questions, first, how do researchers’ definitions of empathy and related constructs contribute to their identification of neurobiological correlates, and how are the contexts or procedures for measuring empathic concern associated with the neurobiological features identified? Second, what can we glean about cohesive or synergistic functioning of multiple levels of neurobiological activity during empathic responses? And third, is there any evidence for age-related changes in the neurobiology of empathy?

Genetics

More than 2 decades of behavioral genetics studies provide strong evidence that empathic concern is partially attributable to heritable factors. This work is now being complemented by molecular genetics studies documenting associations between empathy and allelic variations in genes. A number of gene candidates have been identified, and studies are beginning to replicate associations between genes and empathic concern. Importantly for the goals of this chapter and handbook, many of these studies have taken a developmental focus to the question of the genetic basis of empathic concern.

Behavioral Genetics

Behavioral genetics studies have given insight into the development of the contributions of genetic factors to empathic concern for others. In a foundational program of developmental research, Zahn-Waxler and colleagues (Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, & Emde, 1992; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2001; Knafo, Zahn-Waxler, Van Hulle, Robinson, & Rhee, 2008) observed empathic concern (an affective form of empathy), cognitive empathy, and prosocial behavior of monozygotic and dizygotic twins at 14, 20, 24, and 36 months in response to adults’ simulations of injury and distress. Children’s empathic concern increased only from 14 to 20 months and then leveled off, compared with substantial increases at all time points for cognitive empathy and prosocial behavior. The contributions of heritable factors to these aspects of empathy also increased from low in infancy (0% to 35%, across measures and analyses) to more substantial in the early preschool period (15% to 47%).

Numerous studies of independent samples also have found support for increases in the heritability of concern for others across early and middle childhood using parent and teacher reports of empathy and prosocial behavior (Hur & Rushton, 2007; Knafo &
Plomin, 2006; Scourfield, John, Martin, & McGuffin, 2004). Across these and other studies, heritability indices typically are stronger for questionnaire measures of empathy than for direct observations of emotion and behavior. Analyses of changes in heritability estimates indicate that, with age, additional genetic effects add their contributions to the predictions of empathic concern (Knafo & Plomin, 2006; Knafo, Zahn-Waxler et al., 2009). This pattern could suggest that the influence of genetic effects on empathy increases as young children acquire other cognitive and affective capacities, themselves at least partially genetically based, which supports their other-oriented responses.

Thus, there is consistent evidence that genetic factors contribute to multiple aspects of concern for others, that they do so from early in life, and that their contributions strengthen with maturation. Recognizing that evolution has preserved these traits or qualities within the human species, it has behooved researchers to begin identifying genotypes associated with the human capacities of empathy, sympathy, altruism, and prosocial behavior. Much of this research has been focused on genes associated with the neurotransmitter dopamine, and genes associated with the neuropeptides vasopressin and oxytocin.

**Molecular Genetics**

Dopamine is produced and utilized as a neurotransmitter in many brain regions, and particularly those involved in approach behaviors, reward processing, and aggression. The DRD4 gene (dopamine receptor D4) contributes to the transmission of dopamine across neural synapses, with shorter versions of DRD4 (involving fewer repeats of the gene sequence) being associated with more efficient binding of dopamine to receptors. Bachner-Melman and colleagues (2005) found that adults who were homozygous for shorter DRD4 alleles (4 repeats) reported being more altruistic than those who had one or more longer alleles (7 repeats). DiLalla and colleagues (2009) later observed that preschool-aged twins with homozygous short DRD4 alleles shared more with each other during play than did twins with heterozygous or homozygous long alleles, although the groups did not differ in prosocial behaviors toward peers. Given the roles of dopamine in approach behaviors and positive arousal to rewards, and the greater efficiency of synaptic transmission of dopamine conferred by shorter DRD4 alleles, these researchers have suggested that individuals with homozygous short alleles might experience positive other-oriented actions as more rewarding. Hence, their prosocial actions would be reinforced to a greater degree than would those of individuals with longer, less efficient DRD4 genotypes. Additional support for the importance of efficient dopaminergic function for prosocial behavior came from a recent study of the COMT gene (catechol-O-methyltransferase), which is associated with the breakdown and recycling of dopamine (Reuter, Frenzel, Walter, Markett, & Montag, 2011). Adults with the more efficient COMT allele made larger donations to charity in a laboratory task, compared to adults with less efficient alleles.

The neuropeptides vasopressin and oxytocin are known to be important for social and affiliative behaviors in mammals. The vasopressin genes AVPR1A (arginine vasopressin receptor 1A) and its promoter region RS3 have been linked with altruism in adults (Knafo, Israel et al., 2008) and children (Avinum et al., 2011). Both of these studies examined donating behavior, or altruistic giving, in laboratory tasks based on the commonly used...
dictator game, and the study of adults also considered self-reported values of compassion, benevolence, and universality. Having longer alleles (more repeats) of RS3 was associated with larger donations in both studies, with some evidence of curvilinear effects in the children, and in adults, a stronger orientation toward the needs and well-being of humanity. Evidence is accumulating that longer RS3 alleles are associated with greater expression of the AVPR1A vasopressin gene and greater activity in some brain regions including the amygdala and hippocampus (Ebstein, Knafo et al., 2012), suggesting that this genotype supports stronger functional activity of vasopressin systems.

Parallel research using economic games to study associations between donating behavior and the OXTR (oxytocin receptor) gene have yielded mixed findings regarding whether variations in OXTR are (Israel et al., 2009) or are not (Apicella et al., 2010) associated with altruism. However, a third study linked this gene to cognitive empathy: Adults with the A allele of OXTR specific nucleotide polymorphism rs53576, which confers lower levels of functional oxytocin activity, were less able to identify emotional expressions from pictures of eyes, and reported less affective and cognitive empathy on questionnaires, compared to adults who were homozygous for the more efficient G allele (Rodrigues et al., 2009). Thus, a tentative conclusion could be that vasopressin and oxytocin genes contribute to propensities for different aspects of empathic concern for others: prosocial and altruistic actions versus cognitive empathy, respectively.

An exciting new direction for genetics researchers involves considering the moderating effects of the environment on gene expression through life experiences. Three recent gene by environment (G X E) studies of empathic development were based on the differential susceptibility to influence model (Ellis et al., 2011). From this model, genotypes (or other dispositional factors) that previously had been considered “vulnerabilities” for poor outcomes are reconceptualized as “susceptibilities,” demarcating children who are more malleable, or open to influence by external factors, for better or for worse. Accordingly, children with less efficient, longer-repeat DRD4 genes have been hypothesized to be more subject to socialization experiences that could support or undermine empathic concern, relative to children with the more efficient shorter-repeat genotype.

Indeed, this pattern was evident in two out of three studies. Using observed prosocial behavior toward an examiner and mother-reports of prosocial behavior, Knafo and colleagues (Knafo, Isreal, & Ebstein, 2011) found that preschoolers with the 7-repeat allele of DRD4 were the most prosocial when mothers were more positive and less punitive, and the least prosocial when maternal parenting was negative. These associations were not evident in children homozygous for the 4-repeat allele. Similarly, Bakermans-Kranenburg and Van Ijzendoorn (2011) reported that it was only for school-age children with the 7-repeat DRD4 allele that having more secure attachment representations predicted larger altruistic giving (donations to charity). Given the relatively weaker efficiency of longer DRD4 genes, these studies suggest that although children with these genotypes might find engaging in positive other-oriented acts to be less rewarding intrinsically, they can experience the positive effects of receiving parental support, warmth, and acceptance, and emulate that style in their actions toward others. Conversely, the previously described association of preschoolers with longer DRD4 genes sharing less with their twin siblings (DiLalla et al., 2009) was not moderated by parental sensitivity, perhaps suggesting that
socialization effects might not generalize to all targets, or that parental sensitivity alone is not enough to foster sharing with siblings in (potentially) genetically susceptible children.

Summary

Behavioral genetics research has provided evidence for the heritability of all aspects of empathic concern for others, with the contributions of genetic factors increasing over the course of development. Molecular genetics studies have implicated multiple genes that underlie the functioning of neurobiological in affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of empathic concern, with preliminary evidence that different genes might be associated with different aspects of concern, such as DRD4 and COMT being most consistently linked with prosocial behavior. At least in part, these genes contribute to the development of empathic concern by determining how open individuals might be to the socializing influences of their salient relationships and life contexts. It is not surprising that there would be a polygenic basis for a multifaceted characteristic like empathic concern, and it seems likely that future research will reveal the involvement of other genes. More cross-sectional and longitudinal studies will be needed to identify when specific genes begin to contribute to empathic concern, and more G × E studies will be needed to identify the environmental contexts under which those genes make weaker or stronger contributions. The growing precision of epigenetic techniques should facilitate these efforts, as developmental scientists can start to examine gene activation directly.

Neuroanatomy and Neurophysiology

We have argued that the experience of empathy is subserved by a widely distributed neural network involving a number of lower and higher brain regions (Hastings et al., 2006; Light & Zahn-Waxler, 2011). Recent studies have supported this contention, providing more insight into how these regions work together as a system, and revealing patterns of activation that might distinguish between the varied components of empathic concern. Evidence has continued to build in the literature for the integral roles of five neural areas that we linked to empathic concern: the amygdala, insula, orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), and mirror neuron system (MNS). Networks involving these and other neural regions have been proposed to explain how the developing capacities for emotion recognition and sharing, emotional understanding and perspective taking, and emotion regulation underlie the emergence of empathic concern for others (Decety, 2010; Light & Zahn-Waxler, 2011). Despite these informative models, there is still only a small set of papers examining the neurophysiology of empathy from a developmental perspective. In this section, we summarize consistent findings on brain activity and empathic concern in adults and then consider the evidence for similar patterns in children and adolescents.

Neurophysiology of Empathy in Adults

Research with adults has drawn on the complementary strengths of multiple neurophysiological procedures and experimental paradigms to obtain convergent evidence for the
involvement of neural regions in empathic concern. Researchers have both taken neural activation in response to stimuli as prima facie evidence for the brain’s involvement in empathy, and have examined how individual differences in neural activation are related to independent measures of empathic concern. The rich diversity of approaches has contributed to the emerging picture of the neurophysiology of empathy.

Decety (2010, Decety & Howard, this volume) has argued that earlier developing, bottom-up aspects of emotional resonance and empathy are supported by functioning of the amygdala, insula, anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), and OFC. With maturation, top-down cognitive aspects of emotional understanding and sympathy draw on the medial (MPFC) and ventromedial (VMPFC) prefrontal cortex. The anterior insula and ACC have been associated with affective processing and emotion regulation, respectively, and a recent meta-analysis strongly supported the involvement of the anterior insula and ACC in empathy for pain, which could be considered a basic, bottom-up response (Lamm, Decety, & Singer, 2011). For example, Singer and colleagues (2004) scanned participants while they received painful stimulation and while a romantic partner received the same painful stimulation. A well-identified neural matrix for pain sensation was identified in the received pain condition, but only the anterior insula and rostral ACC components of the pain matrix were activated in the partner’s pain condition.

Considerable research suggests that the MNS, located in the prefrontal cortex circuitry including the premotor cortex and inferior frontal gyrus (IFG), plays a role in empathic arousal. Mirror neurons are activated by watching others engage in goal-directed actions, implicating them in the understanding and imitation of others, and researchers have proposed that there are functional connections between the MNS and other brain regions involved in empathic responding, including the insula and amygdala (Carr, Iacoboni, Dubeau, Mazziota, & Lenzi, 2003). Kaplan and Iacoboni (2006) showed that activation of the right IFG while watching videos of goal-directed actions was correlated with self-reported sympathy. Patients with IFG lesions reported lower affective empathy and performed worse on emotion recognition tasks (Shamay-Tsoory, Aharon-Peretz, & Perry, 2009). These and similar findings suggest that the MNS, and particularly the IFG, might support processes underlying bottom-up emotional aspects of empathy.

Evidence for top-down processes of cognitive empathy have utilized such procedures as imagining another’s pain or taking the perspective of another person experiencing pain or strong emotions (Decety & Grezes, 2006). These studies have implicated activity in the OFC, DLPFC, MPFC, superior temporal sulcus, temporo-parietal junction (TPJ), and temporal poles (Decety & Jackson, 2006; Gallagher & Frith, 2003). Patients with OFC lesions have difficulty with inferring others’ mental states (Stone, Baron-Cohen, & Knight, 1998), and those with VMPFC lesions report less cognitive empathy (Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009). Ruby and Decety (2004) showed greater activation in the VMPFC, MPFC, and TPJ when adults imagined how others would feel while viewing emotionally evocative vignettes, compared to focusing on their own feelings. These parts of the prefrontal cortex are involved in executive functioning and monitoring (Ochsner & Gross, 2005), and might support cognitive empathy by inhibiting the overlap between self-representation and other-representation of emotion (Decety & Grezes, 2006). Maintaining the distinction between self and other is likely to be important for the experience of empathy and sympathy rather than emotional contagion and personal distress.
Some neuroscientists have taken a particular interest in compassion, a more intentional or conscious orientation toward the well-being of others that integrates and extends sympathy and cognitive empathy. Studies have associated compassion with regions implicated in affective empathy (right IFG, anterior insula), cognitive empathy and emotion regulation (dorsal ACC, MPFC, DMPFC, VMPFC), and reward processing and approach behavior (ventral striatum, periaqueductal gray [PAG]) (Kim et al., 2009; Rameson, Morelli, & Lieberman, 2012; Simon-Thomas et al., 2011). These latter midbrain regions are rich in dopamine, oxytocin, and vasopressin receptors, and activation in these areas has been linked with caregiving and feelings of maternal love (Bartels & Zeki, 2004). Overlap in the brain regions implicated in feeling love for offspring and compassion toward nonkin could be seen as support for the evolutionary perspective that the caregiving system serves as the foundation for empathic concern for others.

Activation in some of these same regions also has been associated with prosocial and altruistic behavior, such as donating behavior or charitable giving (Moll et al., 2006). Undergraduates who recorded more prosocial acts in daily diaries showed greater MPFC activity when viewing sad images (Rameson et al., 2012). Donating money to family members instead of oneself has been associated with activity in the right TPJ, DLPFC, and ventral striatum (Telzer, Masten, Berkman, Lieberman, & Fuligni, 2011). Overlap in the regions associated with compassion and prosocial behaviors might be indicative of a neural parallel for the ways in which affective and cognitive motivations contribute to helpful, other-oriented actions; participants who showed more altruistic behaviors might also have experienced more sympathetic or compassionate arousal. (Few neuroimaging studies have ruled out such “third variable” explanations for their findings, although Immordino-Yang and colleagues (2009) provide a good example of research moving in that direction.)

Developmental Research on the Neurophysiology of Empathy

A small but growing set of studies have begun to identify whether, and when, these patterns of neural activity are associated with empathic concern for others in children and adolescents. Theory and research on the development of empathy and maturation of prefrontal systems (Decety, 2010a, Decety & Howard, this volume; Light & Zahn-Waxler, 2011) suggest that emotional, bottom-up processes of affective reciprocity should be evident early in life. Some electroencephalography (EEG) studies indicate that the MNS may be functionally present in infants as young as 6–8 months of age (Nystrom, Ljunghammar, Rosander, & von Hofsten, 2011). The MNS may be the neural mechanism that supports empathy-related capacities in infancy including emotion contagion, emotion matching, imitation (Hutman & Dapretto, 2009), and even expressing empathic concern in response to others’ distress (Roth-Hanania, Davidov, & Zahn-Waxler, 2011). Although there has been almost no research investigating the neural and other physiological correlates of empathy at this very early age, the technology is available to do so (e.g., Geangu, Hauf, Bhardwaj, & Bentz, 2011).

There have been such studies at older ages. Pfeifer and colleagues (2008) found that 10-year-old children who reported more affective empathy on a questionnaire also had greater MNS, insula, and amygdala activation while observing and imitating emotional faces. Masten and colleagues (2010) found that youths who showed greater anterior insula
activation in response to seeing a character excluded from a social game also included greater prosocial content in subsequent messages sent to that character. In a cross-sectional study, Killgore and Yurgelun-Todd (2007) found that adolescents had stronger amygdala responses in response to sad faces than did adults. Examining individuals from 4 to 40 years of age, Decety and colleagues (Decety & Michalska, 2010; Decety, Michalska, & Kinzler, 2012) looked at neural activation in response to images of people experiencing pain, and manipulated whether the pain was accidentally or deliberately caused. Overall, children and adolescents showed more activation in the pain matrix, including the amygdala, posterior insula, and supplementary motor area, whereas adult participants showed greater activation in the later-maturing DLPFC. Comparing the intentional and accidental conditions, younger participants recruited more activity in the amygdala, PAG, and insula when viewing intentional versus accidental harm, whereas older participants showed more activity in the VMPFC and greater functional connectivity between the VMPFC and amygdala, suggestive of greater regulation or inhibition of their own affective arousal.

Summary

It is exciting that these kinds of cross-sectional studies are indicating that some of the same neural areas featured in neuroscience models of adult empathy appear to be replicating in younger populations. It is logical that regions associated with bottom-up processes, such as the amygdala, appear more relevant for empathic responses at younger ages than regions associated with top-down regulatory processes, such as the VMPFC. Finding that empathy in children may be affective and visceral, whereas adults may utilize more self-regulatory and perspective-taking processes to support more cognitively demanding sympathetic responses, would be concordant with models of neurophysiological development that emphasize the continued maturation of prefrontal systems through early adulthood (Casey, Galvan, & Hare, 2005; Gogtay et al., 2004). However, it is somewhat discrepant with developmental theory and research that has shown children responding to others’ distress with well-regulated sympathy, compassion, and understanding of their circumstances. In truth, the existing studies do not directly inform our understanding of how the neural basis of empathic concern develops over maturation. There is a marked lack of longitudinal research in developmental social neuroscience linking changes in neural structure and activation across developmental periods with changes in observable emotional and behavioral responses to others. In addition, we know relatively little about whether displays of empathic concern that appear phenotypically similar in children and adults might be associated with distinct evaluative and regulatory processes. It will be important for neurophysiological researchers to begin addressing these issues in their investigations of the development of empathic concern for others.

Neuroendocrinology

Research on the relations between hormonal functions and concern for others originated in examinations of mammalian parental (and most often, maternal) care for offspring, and interactions between mates or other kin. In recent years, a number of researchers have
extended these examinations to consider the roles of various hormones in human displays of empathic concern to nonkin. Evidence is beginning to accumulate for the important contributions of hormonal regulation to empathic concern, although developmentally focused research has been rare.

Sex Hormones

Testosterone, progesterone, and estradiol play essential roles in reproductive and parental caregiving behaviors, and research suggests that they also could contribute to empathic concern. For example, women who showed larger increases in progesterone while interacting with an unfamiliar woman reported greater willingness to sacrifice their own well-being for their partner (Brown et al., 2009). Harris, Rushton, Hampson, and Jackson (1996) found that salivary testosterone levels of both men and women were negatively correlated with self-report questionnaire measures of their empathy, altruism, and prosocial behavior. Administering exogenous testosterone has been shown to reduce adults’ mimicry of emotional facial expressions, accuracy of identifying emotional expressions by looking at the eyes, and donating behavior during economic games (Hermans, Putman, & van Honk, 2006; van Honk et al., 2011; Zak et al., 2009). In a study on children, higher prenatal testosterone levels were associated with less self-reported empathy and decreased performance on a cognitive empathy task (Chapman et al., 2006). Overall, there is growing evidence that chronic and acute levels of the male sex hormone (testosterone) could act against positive affective and behavioral responses to others.

Peptide Hormones

As evidenced in the preceding section on molecular genetics, there has been a recent surge of interest in the role of oxytocin in empathic concern. Taylor and colleagues (2000) proposed that increases in oxytocin reflect a prototypically feminine stress response of “tend-or-befriend” when threatened, involving protection of the self and offspring in order to promote safety, and creation of supportive social networks through prosocial and affiliative actions. In adults, increased oxytocin following an emotionally evocative video has been related to feeling more sympathy during the video and greater generosity in a subsequent economic game (Barraza & Zak, 2009). Intranasal oxytocin administration has been found to increase activity in neural regions implicated in empathy, including the insula and inferior frontal gyrus (Riem et al., 2011). Oxytocin administration also has been found to increase generosity, trust, cooperation, affective empathy, attention to the eyes in facial displays, ability to recognize specific emotions, and the amount of money donated to charity (e.g., Hurlemann et al., 2010; Rilling et al., 2011; Zak, Stanton, & Ahmadi, 2007). However, such individual characteristics as social skills and attachment styles have been shown to moderate the effects of oxytocin on empathic concern (Bartz et al., 2010; De Dreu, 2012). For example, van Ijzendoorn and colleagues (2011) found that administering oxytocin increased women’s charitable donations only if they reported having had supportive parents. Overall, these studies have provided impressive evidence that oxytocin plays a causal role in supporting adults’ empathic engagement with others.
Still, further research is necessary to clarify the conditions and contexts within which it is most likely to fulfill that role.

Vasopressin is also emerging as a potentially important neuropeptide for the regulation of empathy, although it might have divergent implications for males and females. Intranasal administration of vasopressin promoted women’s positive facial expressions in response to other women, but increased men’s negative facial expressions in response to neutral facial expressions in other men (Thompson, George, Watson, Orr, & Benson, 2006; Thompson, Gupta, Miller, Mills, & Orr, 2004). Vasopressin administration has also been shown to selectively impair men’s recognition of negative, but not positive, emotions in other men (Uzefovsky, Shaley, Israel, Knafo, & Ebstein, 2011), and to increase men’s reciprocal cooperation in the prisoner's dilemma game (Rilling et al., 2011). Together, these studies could suggest that vasopressin exaggerates adult males’ mirroring of other males’ social cues, with more negative and potentially aggressive responses to negative and neutral cues, but enhanced prosocial responses in positive contexts. Although intriguing, these findings are complex and should be regarded as preliminary.

Stress Hormones

One of the most widely studied hormones in developmental psychology and psychopathology is cortisol, one of the chief end-products of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis system. There have been relatively few studies of the association between cortisol levels and empathic responding outside of the parental caregiving literature, however. Brown and colleagues (2009) found no association between cortisol and willingness to self-sacrifice. Intriguingly, there is more evidence for the benefits of being the recipient of prosocial behavior from others on cortisol reactivity (DeVries, Glesper, & Detillon, 2003). Several laboratory studies with adults have shown that receiving social support from an interaction partner predicts decreased cortisol reactions to stressors (e.g., Kirschbaum, Klauer, Filipp, & Hellhammer, 1995), a relation that held across 22 studies in a meta-analysis (Thorsteinsson & James, 1999). Some psychoneuroendocrinologists have suggested that the calming or homeostatic effect of receiving prosocial, supportive behaviors on the HPA system may be mediated by the regulatory functions of oxytocin (DeVries et al., 2003; Insel, Gingrich, & Young, 2001).

Summary

At present we can only speculate about the influence of development on the relations between hormones and concern for others. Although there is an extensive literature on cortisol, testosterone, and other hormones in relation to children’s adaptive and maladaptive behaviors, very few studies have extended this work to include empathy and prosocial behavior. It seems unlikely that the reproductive hormones are strong contributors to empathic responsiveness in the toddler and early childhood years, as their concentrations and inter-individual variability are quite low prior to the preadolescent years. Oxytocin and vasopressin might be better candidates for developmental investigations, but there have not yet been studies showing that the relations seen between these hormones and adults’ empathic responses are mirrored in children and adolescents. Future research in developmental
psychophysiology will need to address the possibility of ontological changes in the roles played by hormones in the development of empathic concern for others.

**Autonomic Processes**

Modulations in autonomic measures such as blood pressure, heart rate, skin conductance, and respiration are important for preparing the body to act and offer assistance, regulating one’s own distress and emotions, and communicating needs and emotions to others. These autonomic changes are coordinated by the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the ANS (Berntson, Quigley, & Lozano, 2007). Heart rate and blood pressure are influenced by both autonomic branches, but mathematical algorithms applied to recorded patterns of cardiac activity can distinguish the relative parasympathetic (e.g., respiratory sinus arrhythmia [RSA]) and sympathetic (e.g., preejection period [PEP]) influences on heart function. Another commonly used measure is skin conductance levels; secretion by the eccrine sweat glands, which determine electrodermal conductivity, is exclusively controlled by the sympathetic branch (Dawson, Schell, & Filion, 2007).

One line of research has been built on the supposition that feeling greater empathy for a partner during a social interaction should be paralleled by greater autonomic synchrony between the social partners. Feldman (2012) has hypothesized that affective and autonomic synchrony in parent–infant interactions is foundational to adaptive development, including children’s development of empathy, and has shown that autonomic synchrony is greatest when mothers coordinate their emotional expressiveness to their infants’ affective states (Feldman, Magori-Cohen, Galili, Singer, & Louzoun, 2011). Given that the ANS mediates many of the facial cues of emotional arousal, such as pallor, perspiration, pupil dilation, and muscle movements around the eyes and mouth, the degree of autonomic change displayed by others may provide important cues for the recognition of their needs or distress. The examination of the physiology underlying dynamic emotional exchange between individuals has potential for being a productive avenue for further research on empathic processes.

Far more work has examined the autonomic correlates of concern for others within individuals. Our review of this literature is organized by the three most common ANS measures in empathy research: heart rate, respiratory sinus arrhythmia, and skin conductance. In contrast to the literatures on neurophysiological and neuroendocrine measures, a great deal of the research on ANS and empathic concern has been conducted with children and youths.

**Heart Rate**

Heart rate is usually seen as a fairly global index of arousal, whereas changes in heart rate in response to stimuli have been interpreted as reflecting more specific processes. Heart rate deceleration (HRD) has been linked with both the outward direction of attention in order to take in information (Cacioppo & Sandman, 1978), and the experience of sadness (Hastings, Nuselovici et al., 2009), whereas heart rate acceleration (HRA) is more typical of withdrawal and fear (Ekman, Levenson, & Frieson, 1983). HRD is considered a parasympathetically dominant correlate of other-oriented, empathic responses, whereas HRA
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has been characterized as a sympathetically dominant reflection of personal distress and focus upon one's own discomfort (see Batson & Olson, 1991; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Examinations of these proposals have produced mixed results.

The greatest corpus of work on the relations between empathic concern and heart rate, HRD, and HRA is contained in the developmental studies conducted by Eisenberg, Fabes, and their colleagues (see Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller et al., 1990). These studies typically used videotaped scenarios of someone in distress or difficulty to evoke vicarious physiological reactivity in children, and related this to diverse measures of sympathy and prosocial behavior, or personal distress and lack of helpfulness. Heart rate has been negatively correlated with measures of prosocial responding, or positively correlated with signs of distress in some studies (Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller et al., 1989; Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991). Across several studies, HRD has been associated with some measures of empathic concern, while HRA typically has not (Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller et al., 1990; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Miller, 1990). However, the relations have been low to moderate in magnitude, and sometimes inconsistent. For example, within studies, HRD has associated with empathy, sympathy, or prosocial behavior in one context but not in another (Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller et al., 1990), in one age group but not in a second group (Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller et al., 1989), or in one sex but not the other (Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller et al., 1991). Finally, some studies have failed to find any association between HRD and indices of empathic concern (e.g., Eisenberg, Fabes, Carlo et al., 1992), or the reverse pattern of findings has emerged, with HRA predicting sympathy or prosocial behavior (e.g., Holmgren, Eisenberg, & Fabes, 1998; see also Anastassiou-Hadjicharalambous & Warden, 2007). Overall, while these researchers have found a noteworthy number of associations between HRD and empathic concern, qualified results call into question the universality of a clear distinction between HRD serving as an autonomic index of sympathy versus HRA reflecting an autonomic profile for personal distress.

Inconsistent associations between measures of heart rate and empathic concern may be due to the fact that heart rate is influenced by both branches of the autonomic nervous system, which do not always work in an antagonistic manner. For example, heart rate can accelerate when excitatory (arousing, or up-regulating) sympathetic influence is high, when inhibitory (calming, or down-regulating) parasympathetic influence is low, or when a combination of both forces results in a relatively higher influence of the sympathetic branch (e.g., coactivation of both branches; Berntson & Cacioppio, 2007). Indeed, in Zahn–Waxler and colleagues’ (1995) study of preschoolers, more HRD in response to videotaped depictions of a sad child predicted more sympathetic and prosocial responses toward injured adults, but higher heart rate and skin conductance also were associated with greater empathic concern. This may suggest that coactivation of both ANS branches could be characteristic of some empathic responses. Parsing the relative contributions of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system to cardiac responses might result in clearer relations.

Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia (RSA)

Parasympathetic influence on the heart can be indexed by RSA, a measure of heart rate variability. Both resting or baseline RSA and RSA change in response to stimuli have
been linked to empathic concern in children. Positive associations between baseline RSA and measures of empathy or prosocial behavior have been reported by Eisenberg and colleagues (e.g., Fabes, Eisenberg, Karbon, Troyer, & Switzer, 1994; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Eisenbud, 1993; Liew et al., 2011), as well as others (Diamond, Fagundes, & Butterworth, 2012), but a few studies have found the opposite relation. Eisenberg, Fabes, Karbon et al. (1996), found that baseline RSA was negatively correlated with peers’ reports of girls’ prosocial behavior, and Zahn-Waxler et al. (1995) showed that preschoolers’ baseline RSA was negatively correlated with their empathic concern toward adults’ simulations of injuries. Finally, some studies have failed to find any relation between baseline RSA and empathic concern (Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy et al., 1996; Oveis, Horberg, & Keltner, 2009, as cited in Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010).

In studies of RSA change in response to evocative stimuli, researchers have examined whether suppression (decreases) or augmentation (increases) of RSA supports empathic concern. Many researchers consider moderate RSA suppression to stimuli to be indicative of better emotion regulation, although polyvagal theory (Porges, 2007) and research (Hastings, Nuselovici et al., 2008) suggests that in some contexts, RSA augmentation should facilitate calm, positive engagement with others. Both RSA suppression and RSA augmentation have been associated with empathic concern for others. Adults who reported being more compassionate were found to show RSA augmentation in response to images of others in need (Oveis, Cohen et al., 2009). In developmental research, Gill and Calkins (2003) found that RSA suppression to an audio recording of a toddler crying predicted less concern for the victim in 2-year olds, whereas with older children, Graziano, Keane, and Calkins (2007) found that RSA suppression to a challenging puzzle was associated with peers’ ratings of kindergarteners being more prosocial (e.g., “shares”). Hastings et al. (2000) reported that preschoolers with lower RSA during a sad video were described by teachers as showing more prosocial behavior 2 years later, but RSA did not predict observed, self-reported or mother-reported sympathy. Similarly, Liew and colleagues (2011) found that toddlers’ RSA suppression during an examiner’s simulation of distress predicted more helping responses to a distressed adult 1 year later, but not children’s sympathetic responses to the simulation.

Thus, three studies of children suggest that some RSA suppression might support positive behavioral responses to others, although not emotional. It is possible that instrumental prosocial acts like sharing and helping require some mobilization of resources and increase in activity; withdrawal of parasympathetic down-regulatory influences should support such efforts. Emotional responses like sympathy, concern, and compassion require balancing empathic resonance for another’s distress with the maintenance of personal calm and feeling safe to engage socially, which could be supported by parasympathetic dominance of the autonomic balance, as observed in the study by Oveis and colleagues (2009). When, or even whether, children might show evidence for RSA augmentation supporting sympathetic or compassionate responses remains uncertain.

Skin Conductance

There have also been investigations of relations between sympathetic nervous system activity and empathic concern for others. In five studies by Eisenberg and colleagues that
included measures of skin conductance responses to filmed stimuli (Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy et al., 1996; Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991; Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Miller et al., 1991; Fabes et al., 1993; Holmgren et al., 1998), higher skin conductance was negatively associated with one or more measures of concern for others, or positively associated with one or more measures of personal distress and avoidance behaviors (e.g., gaze aversion). In one of these studies, however, higher skin conductance levels in young girls also predicted teacher reports of more prosocial behavior (Holmgren et al., 1998), akin to the results reported in Zahn-Waxler et al. (1995). Even more striking, in a recent study of adults (Hein, Lamm, Brodbeck, & Singer, 2011), higher skin conductance while watching another person experience physical pain predicted a particularly costly form of altruistic helping: greater willingness to receive a subsequent painful stimulus in place of the person they had previously watched.

Evidence appears to be about divided, then, between sympathetic arousal in response to others’ distress interfering with empathic concern for others, or supporting more prosocial engagement. Considered in parallel with the research on RSA described previously, this again might suggest that different ways of responding positively to others could be supported by decreases versus increases in levels of sympathetic activity. Together, these studies could point toward a pattern of autonomic coactivation (Berntson & Cacioppio, 2007), or simultaneous modest increases in both parasympathetic and sympathetic efferation, as being most conducive toward positive, other-oriented affective and behavioral responses to the needs of others.

Summary

The associations between ANS regulation and children’s empathic concern for others frequently are moderated by individual characteristics (e.g., sex, age), contexts (e.g., home, school, lab), and procedures (e.g., empathy-induction techniques, measures of empathic concern). This could be due to the diverse factors that contribute to empathic responding, but the irregularity of correspondence between measures of autonomic physiology and aspects of empathic concern for others could lead one to reasonably question the utility of such measures, at least as applied thus far. Furthermore, the rarity of longitudinal studies necessarily tempers any conclusions that can be drawn about developmental stability or change in the autonomic regulation of empathic concern.

Conclusion

There have been remarkable advances in our understanding of the biology of concern for others in the past decade, particularly for research on molecular genetics, neurophysiological activity, and the functioning of oxytocin and vasopressin systems. This continued progress has further strengthened the empirical support for evolutionary and sociobiological theories on empathy. The evidence for the biological underpinnings of empathy is compatible with arguments that nature has selected for and preserved this affective capacity. To the extent that empathy is a necessary prerequisite for altruism and compassion, therefore, the roots of human morality can be traced through our biology to the evolution of our species. To conclude this review of the biology of empathic concern for others, we
return to the three organizing questions that we identified at the beginning of this chapter, and suggest some directions for future research.

Defining and Measuring Concern for Others

In earlier years, many studies of the biological correlates of empathic concern utilized procedures to elicit empathic responses that had questionable ecological validity, often due to the physical and practical constraints of laboratory paradigms. For example, there have been numerous neuroimaging studies in which participants simply were shown static pictures, and this was presumed to induce “empathy.” Studies have improved, both in terms of clarifying exactly which aspects of empathic concern they attempt to measure or induce (e.g., cognitive empathy versus charitable giving), and improving the ecological validity of their procedures. Some researchers, while continuing to show emotional images, have explicitly asked participants to consider the actors’ emotions, or have provided meaningful context for their emotional expressions through imagery or narratives. Other researchers have involved social partners, both familiar and unfamiliar, in their manipulations, such as measuring physiology while a participant’s loved one experiences distress. The use of computerized simulations of interactions also has increased, such as economic tasks like the dictator game, other means of making charitable donations, and social inclusion/exclusion events like CyberBall.

Thus, researchers have taken steps to bring participants’ experiences in the laboratory closer to the salient and meaningful events in the natural environment that elicit and require empathic engagement. We should be having greater confidence, therefore, that the empathy, sympathy, emotional perspective taking, compassion, or altruism generated in the lab more closely mirrors those emotions, cognitions, and behaviors as seen in the “real world.” This is likely to mean that the neurobiological correlates of empathic concern observed in the lab are increasingly accurate reflections of the physiological features of people’s empathy in their day-to-day interactions with others. This is not to say that there is not room for further improvements in our scientific methods, of course. For example, exciting directions could be the increased use of ambulatory recording systems to study physiology in real-world contexts, near-infrared spectroscopy to study neural activity in infancy and early childhood, and administration of exogenous hormones (e.g., oxytocin nasal sprays) to experimentally manipulate physiology and test causal models in adults. Such emerging procedures and measures will allow researchers to study the neurobiology of empathic concern across wider ranges of development and contexts (see Light & Zahn-Waxler, 2011).

Multiple Levels of Analysis

Researchers have begun to conduct multilevel neurobiological analyses, such as considering how individuals with differing genotypes differ in neural activation, examining how neural and hormonal reactivity are associated, or studying how links between autonomic and hormonal arousal relate to adjustment (e.g., Hastings, Shirtcliff et al., 2011). Such efforts have begun to be extended to the study of empathic concern (e.g., Chiao, 2011), and the research we have reviewed herein points to more directions of inquiry that are likely
to be fruitful. For example, research could build on the links between empathic concern and oxytocin across the genetic (the OXTR gene), neural (e.g., periaqueductal gray), and endocrine (oxytocin itself) levels. This work could even extend to other hormonal systems and to autonomic regulation, as oxytocin has been implicated in the modulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) stress axis (Neumann, 2003) and the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system (Porges, 2001). Genes, brain activity, hormones, and autonomic processes do not function independently of one another, nor do they only make independent contributions to affective and behavioral responses. We know little about how the temporal and interactive relations between these multiple levels of physiological activity contribute to empathic concern for others. Addressing this gap in our understanding will be one of the essential next horizons in empathy research.

This call for attention to multiple levels of analysis is not limited to examining what goes on inside the body. Recent years have borne witness to the rapidly growing interest in epigenetic processes and the surge in research efforts aimed at examining interactions between dispositional and environmental contributors to development. Researchers currently working within these paradigms are poised to make exciting new discoveries of the contexts, conditions, and mechanisms by which neurobiological activity gives rise to empathic concern. Such investigations could include examining which aspects of the social and physical environment foster and suppress individual differences in the biological processes that support empathy, what kinds of life experiences produce changes in the physiological systems that are necessary for empathy, and whether some components of the biology of empathy are more amenable to environmental influences than others. We should look forward to seeing more examples of such efforts in the near future.

Developmental Considerations

Researchers also have begun to address the question of whether the biology of empathic concern changes with age. Although the vast majority of studies on the biology of concern for others have been single time-point investigations with a single age group, and thus not effective for illuminating developmental processes, that situation has begun to change. For example, researchers have demonstrated that children and adults share some, but not all, neural responses to empathy-inducing images (Decety et al., 2012). Still, there is a long way to go before we can truly claim to have an empirically informed understanding of the development of the neurobiology of empathic concern for others. In order to obtain a more comprehensive developmental picture, we also need to further differentiate, conceptually and empirically, the different components of concern for others. For example, affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and prosocial actions are interrelated to a degree. But they also have unique features that need to be distinguished as we continue to explore the biological underpinnings of their expression throughout development.

Thus, many of the questions we posed in an earlier examination of this literature (Hastings, Zahn–Waxler, & McShane, 2006) are still relevant today: Do toddlers, adolescents, and adults across maturity experience the same kinds of neural activation, hormone secretion, and autonomic arousal when they feel empathy? Are there maturational events that trigger the onset or offset of gene activities that affect prosocial behavior? Are individual differences in the physiological processes associated with empathic concern developmentally
stable, or particular to maturational stages? Are there sensitive periods for the moderating influences of environmental conditions on the neurobiology of empathic concern? More developmental comparisons and, in particular, more longitudinal investigations will need to be undertaken in order to advance our understanding of the developmental neurobiology of empathic concern for others.

References


The Neurobiological Bases of Empathic Concern for Others


Most developmental research into morality so far has focused on children and adolescents, as can be seen in the contributions of this current volume. We think that the time is ripe to take a serious look at the moral lives of babies.

One motivation for this comes from evolutionary theory. Biologists have long been interested in how a species like ours—in which large groups of nonkin work together on projects of mutual benefit—could come to exist. This was largely a mystery at the time of Darwin, but there are by now several candidate theories for how our complex social structures can arise. These include the accounts developed in the 1970s and 1980s based on kin selection and reciprocal altruism (e.g., Axelrod, 1984; Trivers, 1971, 1985), as well as theories based on group selection—a proposal once derided by biologists, but now returning as a serious contender (see Nowak & Highfield, 2011, for an accessible review). Such theories explain our complex social structures as grounded in certain propensities that we can view as moral, including altruism to nonkin, guilt at betraying another, and righteous anger toward cheaters. While the details are a matter of considerable debate, the notion of unlearned moral universals is consistent with what we now know about biological evolution. And one way to explore the nature of such universals is to look at babies.

The second motivation comes from developmental psychology. Over the last 30 or so years, findings based on looking-time methods set off a revolution in how we think about the minds of babies. The original studies used such methods to focus on early knowledge of physical objects—a baby’s “naïve physics.” A vast body of research now suggests that—contrary to what was taught for decades to legions of psychology undergraduates—babies think of objects largely as adults do, as connected masses that move as units, that are solid and subject to gravity, and that move in continuous paths through space and time (e.g., Baillargeon, 1987; Spelke, 1990; Wynn, 1992). Other studies have found rich social understanding. For instance, babies before their first birthday appreciate that individuals have goals (Gergely et al., 1995; Woodward, 1998) and soon afterward they appreciate the other individuals can have false beliefs (Onishi & Baillargeon, 2005). These sorts of findings make it plausible that some rudimentary moral capacities will also be present in young babies.
In a sense, then, ours is a “nativist” approach, in that it takes seriously the proposal of an innate morality. But we do see this as an empirical proposition, to be supported or falsified by empirical study. Moreover, adults possess certain moral propensities and judgments that we should expect, from an evolutionary perspective, not to show up in young babies. These include aspects of morality that have no genetic payoff, such as kindness to distant strangers. We will return to this issue at the end of the chapter.

Some investigators, including many in this volume, begin their inquiry by proposing an explicit definition of morality. Certainly one needs to have a rough sense of what one means by morality in order to study it, but we think that starting with a definition is ill advised. After all, there is no agreed-upon definition of morality by moral philosophers (Nado, Kelly, & Stich, 2009), and psychologists sharply disagree about what is and is not moral (see, e.g., Turiel, 1998, and Haidt, 2012, for conflicting proposals.). Some argue that from a psychological perspective, morality does not correspond to a natural kind—that is, what we normally talk about as “moral” corresponds to distinct neural and cognitive systems (Sinnott-Armstrong & Wheatley, in press). In the end—just as with notions such as language and memory—the proper scope of morality (as a psychological construct) is an empirical question, to be resolved as we learn more about the mind.

**Moral Sentiments**

One can distinguish moral understanding from moral sentiments. It is one thing to judge that certain acts are right or wrong—to appreciate, for instance, that if X hits Y for no reason, then X has done something wrong. It is another to have moral emotions, to feel sympathy for the pain of Y and anger toward X. While most of the research that we discuss below focuses on understanding, there is little doubt that such sentiments are critical to morality. As David Hume (1739/2000) pointed out, without moral passions, our moral reasoning would be useless—we might know right from wrong, but we would never be motivated to act upon this knowledge.

There are several moral emotions, including guilt, shame, gratitude, and anger, but most developmental research has focused on caring about other people—sometimes described as compassion. Is this an inherent part of our natures?

Many scholars believe that it is, that it makes society and culture possible. In his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1759, Hume’s contemporary Adam Smith begins with:

> How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner.

(Smith, 2002, p. 11)

We see hints of such moral “principles” early on. Laboratory studies find that young infants just a few months old will become distressed and cry when they hear the cry of another baby (Sagi & Hoffman, 1976), and this is supported anecdotally. In his classic article on the development of his son, William, Charles Darwin describes, as evidence of the
“moral emotions,” his son’s reaction to the suffering of others: “With respect to the allied feeling of sympathy, this was clearly shown at 6 months and 11 days by his melancholy face, with the corners of his mouth well depressed, when his nurse pretended to cry” (Darwin, 1877, p. 294).

Contemporary research finds that such responses are not merely reactions to aversive noise; babies do not cry as much when they hear a recording of their own cry (Dondi, Simion, & Caltran, 1999) or the cry of an infant chimpanzee (Martin & Clark, 1982). Still, a skeptic might wonder whether this crying really reflects compassion, as opposed to, perhaps, reflecting a competitive motivation (if another baby is claiming the attentions of an adult, their own crying might serve well to get in on the action themselves). We know that this isn’t entirely the case for other creatures, as they engage in a range of behaviors to stop the pain of other members of their species. Hungry rhesus monkeys avoid pulling a lever to get food if a lever pull gives another monkey a painful electric shock (Wechkin, Masserman, & Terris, 1964; Masserman, Wechkin, & Terris, 1964). Rats will press a bar to lower another rat suspended in midair or trapped in a tank full of water; and, like monkeys, rats will refrain from pressing a bar that provides food if the bar press shocks another rat (Rice & Gainer, 1962; Rice, 1964).

What about human toddlers? There are many anecdotes of soothing actions by 1-year-olds: the patting and soothing of others in distress (for review, see Hoffman, 2000). An influential series of studies by Carolyn Zahn–Waxler and her colleagues took this into the lab, analyzing how babies respond to acted-out pain by those around them, such as their mother banging her knee or an experimenter getting her finger caught in a clipboard (Zahn–Waxler et al., 1992a, 1992b). They found that toddlers often soothe in such situations (and they are more likely to do so for their parents than for strangers). Twin studies suggest that the extent of soothing is partially heritable (Zahn–Waxler et al., 1992b). Girls are more likely to soothe than boys, which meshes with a broader literature suggesting that females are more prone than males to empathy and altruism (see Baron-Cohen, 2004, for review.)

Other studies have found that toddlers will voluntarily act to assist an adult experimenter having difficulty with a task such as putting books away in a cupboard or hanging clothes on a line (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006; see also 2009), and will do so even at a cost to themselves (e.g., momentarily abandoning an especially enjoyable activity; Warneken & Tomasello, 2008). Interestingly, this behavior occurs not only without reward, but actually decreases under conditions of explicit reward and approval (Warneken & Tomasello, 2008), suggesting that helping others is intrinsically rewarding to the young human. Such findings suggest that young children have prosocial tendencies that influence their social actions and interactions; in some circumstances at least, they care about others, and this motivates certain positive actions.

A Moral Sense

Psychological research into the moral emotions of babies has been ongoing for a long time, but it’s only recently that psychologists have explored the origins of what the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment described as a moral sense. This is not the same as an impulse to do good and to avoid doing evil. Rather, it is the capacity to make certain types
of judgments. Smith, though himself skeptical of its existence, provides the best description of the moral sense, as:

somewhat analogous to the external senses. As the bodies around us, by affecting these in a certain manner, appear to possess the different qualities of sound, taste, odour, colour; so the various affections of the human mind, by touching this particular faculty in a certain manner, appear to possess the different qualities of amiable and odious, of virtuous and vicious, of right and wrong.

(Smith, 2002, pp. 379–380)

Do babies have such a sense? At minimum, they are sensitive to the valences of different actions. Premack and Premack (1997) repeatedly presented 1-year olds with (habituated them to) a computer-animated display in which one character acted positively toward another character (by caressing it or by helping push it through a tight gateway it was trying to squeeze through); infants were shown this until they became bored as indicated by significantly decreased looking times. These infants looked significantly longer (dishabituated) when they were then shown displays in which one character acted negatively toward another by hitting it. In contrast, infants who were habituated to negative interactions (in which the first character hit the second, or prevented it from getting through the gateway by nudging it backward) did not dishabituate when subsequently shown an example of hitting—they continued to be bored by this new example of negative behavior. These results suggest that infants found a helping action to be similar to a caressing action, and a hindering action to be similar to an act of hitting. That is, preverbal infants recognized the commonality of valence shared by the two perceptually distinct prosocial interactions (helping and caressing), and by the two perceptually distinct antisocial interactions (hindering and hitting).

In our own studies, first conducted in collaboration with Kuhlmeier, we found that infants are sensitive to the valence of social interactions in predicting the behavior of others (e.g., Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & Bloom, 2003, under review; Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007; see also Wynn, 2008). In these studies, infants were shown events in which a character—the Climber—repeatedly attempted to ascend a steep incline. In some trials, the Climber was helped uphill by an individual (the Helper) who nudged the Climber from behind; in others, the Climber was pushed downhill by a different individual (the Hinderer) (Figure 20.1A). Infants were then shown test events in which the Climber, on alternate trials, approached the Helper and approached the Hinderer (Figure 20.1B), and their looking times to these two events were measured. We found that infants discriminated these events in their looking times, suggesting that they expected the Climber to hold distinct attitudes toward the two characters. More specifically, when the characters had “faces,” making them salient social beings, 9- and 10-month-old infants (but not 5- or 6-month olds) looked longer when the Climber approached the Hinderer than when it approached the Helper, suggesting that they expected the Climber to be inclined to avoid the Hinderer but not the Helper (Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & Bloom, under review; Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007; see also Wynn, 2008).

Our interpretation of these findings is that they reflect a form of social evaluation, tapping infants’ mental attributions to the characters. This view is supported by longitudinal evidence that individual infants’ performance on this task at 1 year of age correlates
positively with their performance on a battery of theory of mind tasks at 4 years of age
(Yamaguchi, Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & vanMarle, 2009). (In contrast, infants’ performance on
a nonsocial, auditory number-discrimination task (from vanMarle & Wynn, 2006) does
not correlate with their later theory of mind performance.) Note that, in addition to sup-
porting our interpretation that infants’ responses in our “hill-climbing” task reflect their
assessments of the mental states of others, such findings also suggest that there are stable
individual differences in theory of mind capacities within the normal population, even
from the first few months of life.

The studies described above assessed babies’ capacity to generate social predictions;
they did not probe for the possible presence of early moral evaluation. Accordingly, our
next step was to ask how babies themselves feel about positive and negative social ac-
tions—and toward the actors who engage in them.

In collaboration with Hamlin, we have conducted a series of studies to address this is-

Figure 20.1 Computer-animated events of Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & Bloom (under review).
See also Wynn, 2008. One character (in this example, the Square) helps the red Climber
get up the hill by nudging it from behind; another (the Triangle) pushes it down the hill
by nudging it from the front.
behind; on other attempts, a third character interfered with the Climber’s efforts by pushing it downhill (see Figure 20.2, Panels A and B). Would infants see the former action as helpful and “good,” and the latter action as unhelpful and “bad”? Would they feel warmly toward the helpful individual, and be negatively inclined toward the hindering one? Following habituation to these events, an experimenter (blind to which character was the “good” and which was “bad”) held out both the helpful and the unhelpful characters to the infant simultaneously, and encouraged the infant to express its preference for one over the other by reaching for one of them (Figure 20.2, Panel C).

Figure 20.2  (A): Helper pushes Climber up. (B): Hinderer pushes Climber down. (C): Whom does Baby prefer?

Credit (for A, B, and C): Live-presentation, three-dimensional “Hill” events enacted to infants in Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom (2007; adapted from Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & Bloom, 2003, under review). One character (in this example, the Ball) helps the yellow Climber get up the hill by nudging it from behind; another (the Square) pushes it down the hill by nudging it from the front.
As predicted, both 6- and 10-month-old infants overwhelmingly preferred the helpful individual (see Figure 20.3, first four bars). Such a result can be explained three different ways, however: Babies might be drawn to the helpful individual; they might be repelled by the hindering individual; or both. We explored this question in a further series of studies that introduced a neutral character, one that neither helps nor hinders. We found that, given a choice, infants prefer a helpful character to a neutral one, and prefer a neutral character to one who hinders. This finding indicates that both inclinations are at work—babies are drawn to the nice guy and are repelled by the mean one. Again, these results were not subtle; babies almost always showed this pattern of response.

These findings have recently been extended to two additional social scenarios (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011). In the first, 5- and 9-month-old infants saw a puppet attempting to pry up the lid of a box, where the lid keeps falling back down after being raised partway. On alternating attempts, a “prosocial” puppet came forward and grasped the other side of the lid in the same manner as the protagonist, so helping to successfully open the box; and an “antisocial” puppet came forward and jumped onto the lid of the box, slamming it shut (see Figure 20.4). In the second new scenario, 5-month-old infants saw a puppet playing with a small ball. In alternating events, this puppet rolled the ball toward (a) a “prosocial” puppet, who picked it up and rolled it back to the protagonist, and (b) an “antisocial” puppet, who picked it up and absconded offstage with it (see Figure 20.5). As predicted, in both...
Figure 20.4  (A): Kitty on left helps puppy open box.  (B): Kitty on right jumps on box, closing it.

Credit (for A and B): “Box” events from Hamlin & Wynn (2011). Puppy attempts to open the box but cannot fully lift the lid. One kitty helps the puppy open the box; the other slams the lid shut.
the “box” and “ball” scenarios, when given an opportunity to reach for the prosocial or the antisocial puppet, all ages of infants robustly chose the former (Figure 20.3, last six bars).

Note that the three scenarios described above differed from each other in important ways. The original “hill” scenario involved a character acting toward a location goal that was specified by its movement along a trajectory; progress along this trajectory was facilitated by the prosocial Helper, and impeded by the antisocial Hinderer, each of whom forcefully contacted the Climber with equal strength. The “boxes” scenario featured a character with a different sort of goal, that of effecting a state-change upon an object (of opening the closed box), specified by repeated-but-failed attempts to lift the lid; these same actions were repeated by the Helper, while the Hinderer responded in an entirely different manner. Finally, in the “ball” scenario, no goal was expressed by the protagonist: The goodness of the prosocial puppet was because it gave back a ball (which could be seen as participating in a reciprocal give-and-take); the badness of the antisocial puppet was because it ran away with the ball. Yet despite these large differences in form, detail, and structure, infants responded similarly across all three scenarios, indicating the operation of abstract, nonperceptual concepts of prosocial and antisocial behavior.

Other researchers used a similar infant-choice methodology to find that 1-year olds generate preferences after observing a very different type of social behavior—fair versus unfair allocation of resources. Geraci and Surian (2011) presented 10- and 16-month-old infants with puppet shows in which a lion and a bear distributed disks to a donkey and a cow. The lion (or bear) gave each animal one disk, and the bear (or lion) gave one animal two disks and the other nothing. The lion and the bear were then held up, and the toddler subjects were asked, “Which one is the good one? Please show me the good one.” The 10-month olds guessed randomly, but the 16-month olds preferred the fair divider over the unfair one. (See also Schmidt and Sommerville, 2011, and Sloane, Baillargeon, & Premack, 2012, for looking-time studies that assess infants’ and toddlers’ expectations about fairness.)
What about very young babies? Just how early does the capacity to make judgments on the basis of behavior emerge? To explore this, we tested 3-month olds by showing them our “hill” and “ball” scenarios. Being so young, they were unable to reach for one of the actors to indicate their preference, and so we assessed their preference by showing them both characters simultaneously in a preferential looking paradigm and noting which one they were more drawn to visually (see Figure 20.6A). This method exploits

![Test display (from Hill scenario) in 3-month old preferential-looking task of Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom (2010). Infants were shown the prosocial and antisocial characters simultaneously for 20 seconds; looking time to each was measured during this period. Procedure was the same for Ball scenario in Hamlin & Wynn (2011; test display not shown). (B): Percentage of 3-month olds who oriented more to prosocial (light bar) and to antisocial (dark bar) characters, for Hill (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom 2010) and Ball (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011) scenarios. Three-month olds oriented significantly toward the prosocial individual in preference to the antisocial individual, both p’s < 0.05.](image-url)
the fact that babies this age tend to look toward characters that they prefer, and, indeed, subsequent analyses of the 6-month olds from Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom (2007) found that these infants, before reaching for the character, would look in the character’s direction (see Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom 2010). As predicted, we found that 3-month olds orient far more toward the prosocial actors than the antisocial ones (see Figure 20.6B)—by a factor of over two to one (Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom, 2010; Hamlin & Wynn, 2011). Even at this young an age, then, infants’ attention is already directed toward cooperative, reciprocating individuals and away from noncooperative individuals. Importantly, this is long before infants themselves have had personal experience in moving from one location to another (as the Climber is attempting in our “hill” scenario) or in reaching for and handing over objects (as the protagonist is doing in our “ball” scenario).

We also find an intriguing developmental pattern. Like 5-month-old and older infants, 3-month olds preferred a neutral character to an antisocial one; but unlike our older babies, they did not prefer a prosocial character to a neutral one. This suggests that judging antisocial actors as “bad” may emerge developmentally prior to assessing prosocial actors as “good”: such a pattern fits well with the so-called negativity bias found in adults (e.g., Abelson & Kanouse, 1966; Aloise, 1993; Kanouse & Hanson, 1972; Knobe, 2003) as well as in children and infants (e.g., Hornik, Risenhoover, & Gunnar, 1987; Leslie, Knobe, & Cohen, 2006; Mumme & Fernald, 2003; Vaish, Grossmann, & Woodward, 2008), in which negative social information is more salient, more rapidly attended to, remembered more readily, and more heavily weighted than is positive information.

The Role of Intentions

The studies described above indicate that even within the first few months of life, humans can differentiate positive from negative interactions, and prefer actors who engage in the former from those who engage in the latter. We will consider now the precise nature of these judgments. Are they really moral ones?

As mentioned above, there is no consensus among philosophes and psychologists as to precisely what counts as “moral.” But there are certain properties that are relatively uncontroversial. For one thing, moral or immoral actions are those done by intentional agents. It is a tragedy if an avalanche kills a person, but, unless one believes that someone set off the avalanche or it was the act of a malevolent deity, it is not a moral transgression. Rocks aren’t moral beings. Further, moral actions are typically those that are done to, or directly influence, other intentional—or at least sensate—entities. Kicking a child is wrong; kicking a puppy is wrong; kicking a stone isn’t wrong. Stones don’t feel anything, and so cannot be wronged.

(Note that there are nuances to this consideration; our qualification of “typically” is to acknowledge the interesting category of actions that are judged as immoral but where nobody is harmed. For instance, many people believe that it is wrong to engage in certain harmless and consensual sexual acts, such as homosexual sex. And many believe that there can be moral wrongs without a sensate moral patient, as when defacing a flag, for instance—and these intuitions remain even when it’s made perfectly clear that nobody is actually harmed [see, e.g., Haidt, 2012]. Such interesting cases fall outside the discussion here.)

The importance of intentional agents and sensate patients motivates us to look again at the infants’ evaluations in the experiments described above. Infants in our studies might be
judging the characters’ actions on the basis of their social impacts, but they might also simply be responding to other features of the interactions. Perhaps, for example, infants preferentially like someone going in an uphill direction because they find it more inspiring than the downhill equivalent; perhaps they like box-opening more than box-closing because box-opening affords the possibility of looking inside the box. There are many nonsocial reasons infants might have preferred the positive to the negative actor in our specific scenarios.

To address this question, we ran a series of control conditions to ascertain whether infants favor the character associated with a given action only when that action is directed toward an animate agent. In these control conditions, we showed infants events in which the recipient of the actions was not a social agent but instead an inanimate object.

In the control condition to our hill scenario, we showed babies (both 6- and 10-month olds, corresponding to the ages tested in the original “hill” scenario) one agent pushing an inert, inanimate object up the hill, and another agent pushing this same object down the hill; infants showed no preference for either agent (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007). The same lack of preference held when we showed these modified stimuli to 3-month olds; they looked equally to both (see Figure 20.7) (Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom, 2010).

In a control condition to our box scenario, infants (5 and 9 months of age) repeatedly saw an inanimate “pincer” grip and partially raise the box lid; in some events, one puppet then grasped the lid and fully opened it, while in other events a different puppet jumped

![Inanimate Control Scenarios](figure)

*Figure 20.7 Inanimate Control Scenarios*

*Credit:* Percentage of infants preferring the Pusher Upper/Box Opener/Ball Giver (light bars), versus the Pusher Downer/Box Closer/Ball Taker (black bars), across the three nonsocial control scenarios and for each age tested. Infants’ preference patterns at all ages and for all conditions differed significantly from their preferences in the social scenarios (depicted in Figure 20.3 for 5-, 6-, 9-, and 10-month olds; and in Figure 20.6 for 3-month olds); in none of the nonsocial conditions did infants significantly prefer one character over the other.
on the partly opened lid, slamming it shut. (This control condition was based on findings showing that infants of these ages view inanimate rods and pincers very differently from intentional agents, and do not assign goals to them; see, e.g., Meltzoff, 1995; Woodward, 1998). In this modified box-opening scenario, infants no longer preferred the box opener (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011). Finally, in the inanimate control condition to our ball scenario, a “pincer” held the ball and manipulated it, dropping it so that it rolled first to one puppet and then another; these two puppets respectively placed it back into the jaws of the pincer (the “giver” puppet), and ran away with it (the “taker” puppet). Infants showed no preference, in this nonsocial context, for a ball giver over a ball taker (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011).

In sum, infants’ responses in our control conditions indicate that in our experimental conditions, they were not responding to superficial perceptual aspects or physical consequences of the actions they witnessed. Rather, they were attending to the social meanings of these actions. Infants across the first year of life readily evaluate actors on the basis of how their actions influence other agents—their social effects and consequences.

One can further ask whether infants are sensitive to the social intentions of an actor, independent of the consequences of a social act. As adults, we distinguish intent from consequence. There is a world of difference between hitting someone by accident versus hitting someone by mistake. Piaget (1965) famously argued, though, that children much older than those we have been talking about are largely insensitive to intentions, focusing solely on consequences in their moral judgments. Is there any evidence that intentions of an actor, independent of the consequences of her action, influence infants’ evaluations of the actor?

Many studies show that infants are capable of distinguishing the intent of an action from its physical consequences: They can identify the intended goal of an action whose outcome is unseen or that fails to achieve the goal (e.g., in 8-month olds: Hamlin, Newman, & Wynn, 2009; in 12- to 18-month olds: Bellagamba & Tomasello, 1999; Csibra, Biro, Koos, & Gergely, 2003; Meltzoff, 1995). But there is no direct evidence, yet, as to whether the intentions per se of an actor engaged in a third-party interaction influence infants’ judgment of the actor. An appropriate experimental design to address this question could consist of showing infants one actor who is deliberately harming (or aiding) another, and another actor who clearly accidentally achieves the same ends, and then asking if infants prefer the clumsy—but-innocent actor to the competently malevolent one (or if they prefer the well-intentioned do-gooder to the accidental do-gooder).

Still, there is suggestive evidence that infants are sensitive to agent intent in their evaluations. In one study, infants 9 months and older (but not 6-month olds) were more impatient with an experimenter (as reflected in behaviors such looking away and disengaging) who was unwilling to give them a toy but who “teased” them with it, than with an experimenter who attempted to hand over the toy but dropped it (Behne, Carpenter, Call, & Tomasello, 2005). Another study found that infants in their second year distinguished an “unwilling” actor from an “unable” actor, being far more likely to later help the former. They were also equally willing to help (a) a “willing” experimenter who successfully managed to hand them a toy, and (b) a “willing” experimenter who tried but failed to do so (Dunfield & Kuhlmeier, 2010). That is, in this study, infants prioritized intent over outcome.

These findings indicate that infants can assess the valence of the intention behind an action, distinct from the valence of the action’s outcome, and that they can generate a disposition toward an actor on the basis of his or her intent. What has not yet been investigated
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is whether infants assess third parties in this manner, as opposed to just those actors with whom the infant him- or herself is engaged. But clearly both of the requisite components are present: Infants can assess the valence of third-party interactions, and they can assess the valence of intent and respond to it appropriately, abstracted away from outcome. Further research will determine when in development these components are integrated into judgments of third-party interactions.

Reward and Punishment

Our mature moral judgments of others have implications for how we think about and interact with them. One interesting implication is that we wish for good individuals to be rewarded, and feel that bad individuals are deserving of punishment.

Indeed, it has been proposed that our urge to punish or shun “evildoers”—those who violate community norms of prosociality—is an essential feature of a cooperative species, one that is required in order for reciprocal altruism and cooperation to evolve (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 2004; Fehr & Rockenbach, 2004). Moreover, not only punishment or shunning of noncooperators themselves, but also the punishment or shunning of those who in their turn fail to punish noncooperators, may be an important requirement for stabilizing cooperation within a group (Henrich & Boyd, 2001).

Some have argued further that we have evolved a taste for “altruistic” or “costly” punishment, where we are willing to suffer to make another pay. This has proved to be controversial, though, as such an inclination is difficult to explain in terms of natural selection. Suppose our society works well—and to our benefit—if free riders are brought into line through punishment. But who does the punishment? Given that it’s costly, we seem to have the free-rider problem all over again. What’s keeping an individual from doing nothing and benefitting from the sacrifice of others, being a free rider when it comes to punishing free riders? Now, it might be that we are motivated to punish those who shirk from punishing free riders . . . but then are we also motivated to punish those who shirk from punishing those who shirk from punishing free riders? Nobody doubts that enforcement is good for the group, but it turns out to be vexingly hard to explain how it could evolve through natural selection (Dreber et al., 2008). Indeed, a recent review of the literature from sociology and anthropology finds that altruistic punishment is rare or nonexistent in the small-scale societies of the real world (Guala, 2012). There are plenty of direct and indirect ways to make wrongdoers, including free riders, suffer. But there isn’t altruistic or costly punishment; real-world punishment tends to be done in ways that are not costly to the punisher, either because they don’t involve confrontation (e.g., gossiping/bad-mouthing someone behind their back) or because they are imposed by the group as a whole, and so no single individual stands out as a target of potential retaliation.

Regardless of the origins of this inclination, it’s clear that adults are motivated to reward do-gooders and cooperators and to punish evildoers and free riders. But when do these tendencies emerge developmentally?

For older children, we might see some hint in the behavior of tattling. Children love to tattle. In studies of siblings between the ages of 2 and 6, researchers found that most of what the children said to their parents about their brothers or sisters counted as tattling (Den Bak & Ross, 1996; Ross & Den Bak-Lammers, 1998). And their reports tended to be accurate.
Based on their study of children in an inner city school in Belfast, Ingram and Bering (2010) note that it is rare for children to talk to their teachers about something good that someone else has done; most of their reports were about negative behaviors. (This is true as well about third-person descriptions of others’ behaviors by adults—gossip.) To better understand children’s motivations for reporting the bad acts of their peers and siblings, it is instructive to look at the conditions under which children tattle. In one study, 2- and 3-year olds were taught a new game to play with a puppet; when the puppet started to break the rules, the children would spontaneously complain to adults (Rakoczy, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2008). Another study found that 3-year olds tended to tattle when someone destroyed an artwork that someone else made, but not when the individual destroyed an artwork that nobody cared about (Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011).

Still, the phenomenon of tattling does not prove that children are interested in just punishment; among other things, they might want to show themselves off to adults as good moral agents, as responsible beings who are themselves sensitive to right and wrong. (It is an interesting question whether children would tattle anonymously.) And these children are relatively old compared to the research we’ve been discussing so far. Is there a way to assess whether a desire exists, in infants, to see just punishment meted out?

To address this question, and to ask whether infants are assessing not only the “pleasantness” of one individual’s act toward another but also the rightness or goodness of it, we have carried out a series of studies investigating infants’ and children’s inclinations to reward and punish, as well as their assessment of others who reward or punish appropriately, compared to those who reward or punish inappropriately (Hamlin et al., 2011).

In one study, we found that the social behavior of an individual toward a third party influences how toddlers wish to treat that individual. After observing interactions in which one puppet acts prosocially and another acts antisocially, 21-month-old toddlers were presented with the opportunity to give a single treat to (i.e., reward) the character of their choice. They robustly chose the more positive character. But when asked to take a treat from (i.e., punish) one of the individuals, toddlers chose the more negative character. The desires to treat well those who do good unto others, and to punish those who violate our social norms of cooperation, are already operative in young childhood.

In a further set of studies, we asked how both toddlers and infants want others to treat prosocial and antisocial individuals. We first showed subjects—infants 5 and 8 months of age—scenarios in which a puppet was trying to open a box; on some occasions a Helpful puppet joined in and helped get the box open, and on other occasions a Hindering puppet jumped on the box lid, slamming it shut. Would subjects wish to have the Helper treated nicely (rewarded), but to have the Hinderer treated badly (punished)? To ask this, we next showed subjects either the Helper, or the Hinderer, in a situation in which it was (in its own turn) treated positively by one new character and negatively by another. Which of these characters would the subject prefer? The experimental events unfolded as follows: After showing its initial prosocial or antisocial tendencies in the “box” scenario, either the Helper or the Hinderer became an actor in a second scenario, in which it played with a ball. It rolled the ball, on alternate trials, toward a new puppet who returned the ball (a “Rewarding puppet”), and toward a different new puppet who kept the ball and ran away with it (a “Punishing puppet”). Subjects were then allowed to choose between the Rewarding and Punishing puppets. Would they choose the Rewarder over the Punisher, when these
puppets were acting on the Helper from the previous scenario? (This might be expected in any case, given that infants appear so robustly to prefer prosocial behaviors). And, of great interest, would they prefer the Punisher over the Rewarder when the two puppets were acting on the Hinderer—a character previously observed to have been antisocial?

It's possible that infants would prefer the Rewarder in both situations, if they were sensitive only to the “local” valence of a social interaction. Giving the ball back is a locally positive act, while taking the ball and running off with it is locally negative. Infants may assess the local valence of an action and respond solely on that basis, without regard to the larger context in which it occurs. Indeed, this is precisely what the 5-month olds did; they attended only to the local valence, and preferred the Rewarder regardless of who it was rewarding.

But the 8-month olds were more sophisticated. They preferred someone who was nice to a prosocial individual over one who was mean (75% chose the Rewarder of the prosocial character); but they also preferred an individual who was mean to an antisocial individual, over one who was nice (81% chose the Punisher of the antisocial character). Even within the first year of life, then, the valence of an individuals’ social behavior influences how we want him or her to be treated, and influences how we judge others who treat that individual positively or negatively.

The finding that even infants 8 months of age prefer individuals who treat do-gooders well, but prefer those who treat evildoers badly highlights an important aspect of our social evaluative judgments. We do not judge an individual solely on the basis of the positive or negative local value of his or her action, taken in isolation. It is the broader context in which a prosocial or antisocial action occurs that determines its ultimate valence. We—even as infants—do favor negative social actions, when the target of the action is someone who has themselves behaved in an antisocial manner.

**Final Word: But Are These Really Moral Judgments?**

Babies show concern at others’ pain and sorrow, make spontaneous efforts to console others, and spontaneously help others even at external costs to themselves, suggesting that helping others is intrinsically rewarding. Within the first few months of life, infants can identify whether a social interaction that takes place between third parties is a positive or a negative one, and this influences their own attitude (attraction or aversion) to whoever initiated the interaction. It also influences their attitude toward other individuals who engage with the actor—what we might call infants’ second-order social judgments. Infants are drawn to those who do good for others, and have an aversion to those who do bad to others; they themselves (at least by toddlerhood ages) prefer to bestow negative treatment upon one who has acted badly toward another, and to bestow positive treatment upon one who has acted prosocially; and, before their first birthdays, they prefer others who reward the good and who punish the bad.

In all these ways, infants’ and toddlers’ social judgments and responses bear a strong resemblance to those of adults. The early emergence of the evaluation of social actions—present already by 3 months of age—suggests that this capacity cannot result entirely from experience in particular cultural environments or exposure to specific linguistic practices, and it suggests that there are innate bases that ground some components of our moral cognition.
Still, babies have a long way to go. The sentiments and evaluations we have reviewed do not comprise a full-fledged system of moral reasoning. We often care about the fate of distant strangers, something which is likely not present in babies or young children, and likely not part of our evolved nature (see Bloom, in press). As David Hume put it, “Were we, therefore, to follow the natural course of our passions and inclinations, we should perform but few actions for the advantage of others . . . because we are naturally very limited in our kindness and affection (Hume, 1739/2000, p. 519).

Also, under many analyses, adult morality can encompass concerns about domains such as sexual purity and religious sanctity (e.g., Bloom, in press; Haidt, 2012; Shweder et al., 1997). Acts such as consensual sexual relations between people of the same sex evoke the same sort of reactions as more prototypical moral violations, such as one person hitting another—outrage, anger, and a desire that the perpetrator be punished. Although we have never looked, we think it unlikely that these reactions will show up early in development.

Finally, adults can reason according to impartial codes of fairness and justice, and we can consciously develop systems that dictate appropriate moral action, as we find in law, religion, and philosophy, and, again, we don’t find this in babies or young children.

Still, what we do find—the capacity to evaluate an individual’s social action as positive or negative, and to generate attitudes toward others based on these evaluations—comprises an essential basis of any moral system that will eventually contain more abstract concepts of right and wrong. We would never be moral beings if we did not start as moral babies.

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Introduction

In the past decade, a dramatic shift in the study of morality has occurred, moving away from incompatible notions of moral development and toward a more integrated theory. An explosion of interdisciplinary research in psychology, anthropology, biology, economics, and neuroscience has resulted in an attempt to more clearly define and investigate the concept of morality across domains. Work amongst these fields of study now suggests that human social sensibility emerges from a sophisticated integration of cognitive, emotional, and motivational mechanisms, which are shaped through cultural exposure, and can therefore be seen as a product of our biological, evolutionary, and cultural history, representing an important adaptive element for social cohesion and cooperation.

New research involving neuroscientific methods lends support to the notion of morality as an integrated process, heavily dependent on emotional sensibilities. Despite the enthusiasm and grandiose claims in the media about the discovery of a moral compass associated with a single region of the brain, the reality is much more complex. Functional neuroimaging studies with healthy participants have shown that, while moral reasoning is underpinned by specific neural circuitry, these circuits are not unique to morality. Rather, they involve communication between regions and systems underlying various affective states, cognitions, and motivational processes. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the study of morality. Indeed, there is no evidence for a direct one-to-one mapping of any psychological construct to a simple underlying neural substrate. It is critical, therefore that moral cognition be decomposed into the multiple processes and representations involved in its neuro-computational implementation, including (but not limited to) the specific capacities for the perception of causation, valuation, agency, cognitive control, emotional inhibition, and theory of mind (Young & Dungan, 2012).

Complimentary to the neuroscience approach is the contribution of developmental psychology as a means of integrating theory and research on the subcomponents of more complex social behaviors. A focus on neurodevelopmental systems is particularly useful, as it allows one to investigate human social tendencies when only some components of, or
precursors to, more mature moral behaviors are observable. Developmental studies can provide unique opportunities to investigate how the components of the developing system interact in ways not possible to view in adults, where all the components are fully mature (De Haan & Gunnar, 2009).

The current chapter integrates developmental research with burgeoning work on the neurological underpinnings of morality. We begin with a comprehensive review of the neurological underpinnings of moral cognition in adults, as evidenced through psychopathology, and neuroimaging studies with typically developing populations and individuals with socioemotional dysfunctions. Next, the neurodevelopment of morality is examined with reference to early signs of sensitivity, fairness, and concern for others, all of which are thought to be precursors to a more mature morality. Neuroimaging studies focusing on the developmental changes to the perception of others’ distress is then presented, supporting the role of affective arousal in moral reasoning. Finally, we discuss new neurodevelopmental data, utilizing functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), eye tracking, and moral evaluation, indicating that the affective, cognitive, and regulatory aspects of empathy involve interacting neural circuits with distinct developmental trajectories. Together these data are consistent with the view that morality is instantiated by functionally integrating several distributed areas/networks involved in affect, mentalizing, decision making, and reward.

**Neurobiological Underpinnings of Morality**

There is now converging evidence from multiple sources, using a variety of methods and levels of analysis, that point to the identification of specific neural networks underlying morality. In this section, we will review studies utilizing neuroimaging methods in healthy participants. Next, we examine investigations of individuals who have deficits in moral judgments that are associated with neurodevelopmental disorders such as psychopathy.

**Neuroimaging Studies in Typically Developing Participants**

In the past decade, research in affective and cognitive neuroscience has turned to functional neuroimaging techniques as a way to identify a network of brain regions involved in moral cognition.

One seminal functional MRI study investigated the neural correlates of moral emotion in participants who were asked to passively view pictures of emotionally charged scenes (e.g., physical assaults, poor children abandoned in the streets, war scenes) with and without moral content (e.g., body lesions, dangerous animals, body products). Results showed that both basic and moral emotions elicited from the scenes with moral content are associated with activation in the amygdala, thalamus, and upper midbrain (Moll et al., 2002a). The orbital (OFC), medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), and the posterior superior temporal sulcus (pSTS) were also recruited when viewing scenes evocative of moral emotions, indicating that these regions play a central role in moral appraisals. Similarly, when participants were engaged in a simple visual sentence verification task, a network comprising the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC), the temporal pole, and pSTS was specifically activated by moral judgments (Moll et al., 2002b). In contrast, judgment
of emotionally evocative, but nonmoral statements activated the amygdala, lingual, and vmPFC. Another fMRI study examined brain regions that were activated during simple ethical decision making about unambiguous written scenarios not containing direct bodily harm or violence (Heekeren et al., 2003). Simple moral decisions (i.e., judging whether the sentence described was morally appropriate or inappropriate), compared to semantic decisions, resulted in activation of pSTS, temporal poles, lateral prefrontal cortex, and vmPFC. To investigate the neural underpinnings of everyday moral decision making, Sommer and colleagues (2010) contrasted stories describing conflicts with either moral or neutral content. In this study, a choice was required between hedonistic, but not illegal, behavior or the fulfillment of a moral obligation toward another person (e.g., after a long working day, you run to the bus stop to catch your transportation. At the bus stop, you see an elderly person who has stumbled and needs help. Helping that person will result in missing your bus. What would you decide?). Regions that significantly increased their activity during the imagination of moral conflicts versus neutral conflicts included the mPFC, right pSTS, and right inferior frontal gyrus (IFG).

More complex moral decision making was investigated by using moral dilemmas, that is, situations where there is a conflict between two or more moral principles, because obeying one principle inevitably leads to disobeying another one. In the first fMRI study of that kind, participants were presented with sentences depicting personal and impersonal moral dilemmas (Greene et al., 2001). In these studies, a typical personal moral dilemma involves having to decide whether or not to push a stranger off a footbridge in front of an oncoming trolley in order to save five people working on the main track (i.e., the footbridge dilemma). In a similar situation, an impersonal moral dilemma involves having to decide whether or not to hit a switch that will turn the trolley to an alternate set of tracks, where it will kill one person instead of five (i.e., the trolley dilemma). In both types of dilemmas, participants were required to judge whether it is appropriate to incur a moral violation (i.e., killing one person) in order to maximize overall consequences (i.e., saving five persons). The results showed that personal dilemmas preferentially engaged regions associated with emotion, including the vmPFC and the amygdala, while impersonal moral dilemmas elicited increased activity in regions of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dLPFC) associated with cognitive control. Another study also aimed at identifying the neural processes underlying moral decision making by introducing a distinction between “moral deliberation,” or the weighing of moral considerations, and the formation of a “moral verdict,” or the commitment to one moral conclusion (Borg Schaich et al., 2011). Increased neuro-hemodynamic activity in regions previously implicated in morality—including the vmPFC, posterior cingulate cortex, and pSTS—was found to be associated primarily with moral deliberation as opposed to moral verdicts.

Another vein of research, tangential to moral reasoning, has looked at the brain response to altruistic actions (behaviors that benefit the recipient at a cost to the donor) such as donations to charities. In one study, participants were scanned while they made real-life decisions about whether to donate to or oppose a donation to a number of charities (Moll et al., 2006). Such decisions were either costly or not costly to the subject. Both pure monetary rewards and decision to donate were associated with activation of the mesolimbic reward system (ventral tegmental area and ventral striatum), whereas the subgenual area and lateral OFC were involved in decisions to oppose donations. The authors concluded
that human altruism draws on general mammalian neural systems of reward, social attachment, and aversion. In another study, neural activity was recorded while participants decided how to split $100 between themselves and a local food bank. Donations (costly to the subject) to the food bank were associated with activation in the ventral striatum (Harbaugh, Mayr, & Burghart, 2007).

As reviewed above, a majority of neuroimaging studies have used experimental paradigms contrasting putatively moral to nonmoral visual stimuli or written scenarios (e.g., moral dilemmas) in which the participants were required to make a judgment (right or wrong) or to imagine what they would feel if they were in these situations. An important, yet less explored, component of the moral calculus is the role of agency. The subjective experience of agency tells us when we are responsible for an event or action and when we are not. The sense of agency is a major dimension to be appreciated in relation to morality in that people can be held responsible for their actions and are expected to pay for their consequences. A sense of agency involves a subjective awareness that one is initiating, executing, and controlling one’s own volitional actions in the world (Gallagher, 2000). In normal, nonpathological experience, the sense of agency is tightly integrated with one’s sense of ownership, which is the prereflective awareness or implicit sense that one is the owner of an action, movement, or thought (Decety & Grèzes, 2006).

A couple of studies have examined the role of agency in moral sensitivity. One study investigated the contribution of agency and of specific moral emotions to brain activation using action scripts (Moll et al., 2007). Results showed that emotionally neutral agency (e.g., your mother asked you for an address, but you didn’t have it) recruited neural networks previously associated with agency and intentionality, encompassing ventral and subgenual sectors of the mPFC, insula, anterior temporal cortex, and pSTS. Compared to emotionally neutral agency, different categories of moral emotions led to distinct activation patterns: (a) prosocial emotions (guilt, embarrassment, compassion) activated the anterior mPFC and pSTS, with (b) empathic emotions (guilt and compassion) additionally recruiting the mesolimbic pathway; (c) other-critical emotions (disgust and indignation) were associated with activation of the amygdala and parahippocampal gyrus.

To investigate the contribution of agency to neural processing involved in morally appropriate versus morally inappropriate behavior, Decety and Porges (2011) had participants in the MRI scanner view a series of visual scenarios in which an individual was either easing the other’s pain or intentionally harming another person. They were required to mentally simulate being the perpetrator or the recipient of those actions. Imagining harming another was associated with a decrease of activity of the vmPFC together with a heightened signal in the thalamus and the head of the caudate nucleus—a region highly innervated by dopamine neurons (Figure 21.1). This pattern of neural response is indicative of a diminished control of aggression in conjunction with an enjoyment of aggression, and is consistent with previous studies that found reduced activation in that region during imagined aggression (Pietrini et al., 2000), or a lack of emotional regulation, such as impulsive aggression and violent behavior (Soderstrom et al., 2000). Functional connectivity analyses, seeded in the amygdala, demonstrated that moral agency (easing the pain of another) was associated with increased connectivity in the ventral striatum. This is an interesting finding that provides support for the motivational aspect of prosocial behavior,
and which is in line with the idea that prosocial behaviors can be motivated by a plurality of motives, including reducing one’s own discomfort, feelings of sympathy for the other, and feeling good about oneself (Decety, 2011).

Taken together, the results of these neuroimaging studies indicate that a restricted number of regions are involved in moral cognition and decision making, particularly the amygdala, pSTS, mPFC, and vmPFC. Altruistic and caring behaviors are associated with the ventral striatum, a region of the brain associated with feelings of satisfaction and reward. Thus, moral cognition seems to be underpinned by specific neural networks, but these networks are not unique to morality; rather, they involve regions and systems underlying specific states of feelings and cognitive and motivational processes.

One serious limitation of a majority of previous studies is that the results rely only on subtraction logic in their designs, which is based on the a priori assumption that one computational process can be added to a preexisting set of processes without affecting them, assuming that there are no interactions among the different components of a given task. Characterizing brain activity in terms of functionally segregated regions does not reveal anything about how different brain regions communicate with each other. Functional connectivity analyses and high-density event-related potentials can identify patterns of communication between regions that contrast analyses may not detect, and such methods are necessary to advance our knowledge of the neuroscience of morality. Further, brain functions are impossible to determine using only functional neuroimaging. Analysis of lesion data has an important and complementary role in understanding the relationship between brain anatomy and function.
Psychopathology of Psychopathy

Since moral cognition involves a complex interaction between emotion and reasoning, one neurodevelopmental condition, psychopathy, is particularly relevant to our understanding of the mechanisms underpinning morality and its development.

In our everyday lives, it is not uncommon for individuals to engage in morally inappropriate behavior (such as cheating) on an occasional basis. However, there are certain individuals who engage in such behaviors consistently and at higher than normal rates compared to the general population (Hare, 1999). A paradigmatic case is psychopathy, a neurodevelopmental personality disorder that is believed to affect approximately 1% of the general population and 20–30% of the prison population. Relative to nonpsychopathic criminals, psychopaths are responsible for a disproportionate amount of repetitive crime and violence in society. These individuals often possess specific traits that point to stunted emotional development and a general lack of empathy. Individuals classified as psychopaths are often callous, shallow, and superficial. They lack fear of punishment, have difficulty regulating their emotions, and do not experience insight into or empathy for the effect their poor behavior has on others. Offenders with high levels of psychopathy show reduced autonomic arousal when viewing a confederate receiving electric shocks (Aniskiewicz, 1979).

The absence of moral behavior in the presence of otherwise intact intellect has fascinated clinicians and researchers alike (Kiehl, 2008). Structural neuroimaging studies associate psychopathy with a host of morphological brain abnormalities, including reduced volumes of the amygdala, reduced gray matter volumes in the frontal and temporal cortex, especially in the right pSTS, and increased volume of the striatum. Furthermore, psychopaths often exhibit signs of reduced structural integrity of the uncinate fasciculus (Koenigs, Baskin-Sommers, & Newman, 2010)—a part of the limbic system connecting the temporal lobe (such as the hippocampus and amygdala) with the vmPFC.

An initial study on morality and psychopathy examined the form of the moral/conventional distinction made by psychopaths versus nonpsychopaths and investigated the categories used by these subjects when justifying their judgments (Blair, 1995). High-scoring psychopaths were significantly more likely to fail at making moral/conventional distinctions and were significantly less likely to reference the welfare of others. Interestingly, high-scoring psychopaths rated conventional violations to be very serious and impermissible even if authorities said that the act was acceptable. Conflicting evidence comes from a study by Ahoroni, Sinnott-Armstrong, and Kiehl (2011), which evaluated 109 incarcerated offenders with varying degrees of psychopathy. This study found no evidence that high-psychopathy offenders—as measured by total psychopathy score—were any worse at distinguishing moral from conventional transgressions than were low-psychopathy offenders. Such results are consistent with an fMRI study examining psychopathic responses to pictures depicting moral wrongs, nonmoral but unpleasant social scenes, and neutral social scenes (Harenski et al., 2010). Psychopathic and nonpsychopathic criminal offenders rated the severity of moral violation depicted in each type of stimuli. Both groups rated moral violations with significantly higher moral severity than nonmoral unpleasant scenes, and no differences were observed between groups within any of the image conditions, suggesting equally accurate abilities to distinguish moral wrongs. Interestingly, brain activation recording during the evaluation of moral violation pictures did detect
differences in psychopaths versus nonpsychopaths. Atypical brain activity was detected in several regions involved in moral decision making, including reduced moral/nonmoral picture distinctions in the vmPFC and anterior temporal cortex in psychopaths relative to nonpsychopaths. A new diffusion tensor imaging study also found evidence of brain abnormality in psychopaths, demonstrating an association between psychopathy and reduced structural integrity in the right uncinate fasciculus, the primary white matter connection between vmPFC and anterior temporal lobe (Motzkin et al., 2011).

Individuals with high levels of antisocial behavior and callous–unemotional traits show consistent deficits in empathic arousal and empathic concern across childhood and adolescence (Hawes & Dadds, 2012). These abnormal responses to moral transgressions or the distress of others may be evident as early as childhood. For example, children with psychopathic tendencies exhibit reduced electrodermal responses to distress cues (e.g., a crying face) and threatening stimuli (e.g., a pointed gun) relative to controls (e.g., Blair, 1999). Cheng, Hung, and Decety (2012) recently investigated this phenomenon by assessing how callous–unemotional traits in juvenile psychopaths are related to empathic arousal deficits. In this study, juvenile offenders with high callous–unemotional traits, juvenile offenders with low callous–unemotional traits, and age-matched typically developing adolescents were shown images of people in pain while ERPs were recorded (Cheng, Hung, & Decety, 2012). Results demonstrated that youth with high callous–unemotional traits exhibit atypical neural dynamics of pain empathy processing in the early stages of affective arousal. This abnormality was exemplified by a lack of the N120 component, thought to reflect an automatic aversive reaction to negative stimuli, and was coupled with relative insensitivity to actual pain (as measured with the pressure pain threshold). Nevertheless, their capacity to understand intentionality (associated with the P300 component) was not impaired. Such uncoupling between affective arousal and emotion understanding may contribute to callous disregard for the rights and feelings of others.

While it has been argued that the ability to empathize is not functionally, neurologically, or psychologically the same as the ability to judge that something is morally wrong (Borg Schaich et al., 2011), there is solid evidence that empathy deficits and a lack of regard for others may play a role in some aspects of moral reasoning, particularly those associated with care–based morality. Adult psychopaths fail to experience distress cues as aversive, an ability that is critical for the development of moral emotions (e.g., guilt, empathy, and remorse), as distress cues are assumed to activate predispositions to withdraw in any observer who processes them, regardless of whether that observer is the aggressor or a bystander (Blair, 1995). To be motivated to be concerned about another’s welfare, one needs to be affectively and empathically aroused and to anticipate the cessation of mutually experienced personal distress (Barnett & Thompson, 2001). This signal may be lacking in psychopathic individuals who exhibit weaker psychophysiological reactions, such as skin conductance reactivity, to emotional stimuli and poor passive–avoidance learning (Kosson, et al., 2006).

Together, research indicates that individuals who score high on psychopathy evaluations understand moral norms but generally disregard them. Their antisocial behavior or callous disregard for others is not based on failures in moral knowledge or reasoning, but rather on the inability to combine reasoning with aversive affective arousal. The atypical processing of negative emotional stimuli, which is an important source for empathic concern and guilt, coupled with poor inhibitory control, may account for morally inappropriate
behavior in psychopaths. Evidence for such deficiencies is found not only in behavior, but also at the neural level of analysis. Dysfunction of the connectivity between the amygdala and vmPFC seems to partially explain low socioemotional responses to others’ distress, though it is important to note that a lack of empathic arousal alone does not explain offensive behaviors. Behavior is caused by rewards and stopped by punishments, with the former influencing behavior more effectively than the latter in most individuals. Offending behavior exists and persists because it is rewarding, and these rewards in turn affect the activity of the mesolimbic dopamine system. For example, pathological reward seeking in individuals with impulsive–antisocial psychopathic traits increases the likelihood of engaging in behaviors that are dangerous to others and themselves (Buckhotz et al., 2010). A functional neuroimaging study of youth with aggressive conduct disorder found increased activation in the striatum and amygdala when adolescents watched people being intentionally hurt by others (Decety, Michalska, Akitsuki, & Lahey, 2009). The extent of amygdala activation to viewing others in pain was positively correlated to the participant’s number of aggressive acts and their ratings of daring and sadism scores. This suggests that increased activity in the amygdala, particularly when coupled with activation in the striatum, may reflect a general arousing effect of reward (Murray, 2007).

Neurodevelopment of Morality

Traditionally, moral reasoning has been considered a product of conscious, gradually developing cognitive processes and deliberations. More recent research with children and adults, however, provides evidence that conscious cognitive processes account for only part of the human moral compass, and that empathy plays an important role in the development of morality (Vaish & Warneken, 2012). In this section, we discuss studies that have examined early signs of moral sensitivity and concern for others from both developmental and neuroscience perspectives.

Early Signs of Moral Sensitivity and Concern for Others

Research on cognitive, social, and emotional development allows us to examine the many individual aspects that contribute to a later moral sensibility, to study these abilities as they come online, and to investigate the interactions between various socioemotional domains.

Recently, a surge of developmental research has examined the seemingly prosocial nature of babies and young children, focusing on behaviors that suggest early precursors to a more mature morality (e.g., Warneken & Tomasello, 2009). These signs involve many aspects of social development that change over time, ranging from emotional reactions in infancy to more cognitive behaviors such as helping and consoling in early childhood.

Though social development is protracted across the lifespan, babies enter the world ready to attend to social stimuli and engage in social interactions. Newborns look significantly longer at a happy facial expression than a fearful one, raising the possibility that this preference reflects experience acquired over the first few days of life (Farroni et al., 2007). Newborns are drawn to the human face, preferentially attending to schematic face-like stimuli over scrambled or blank canvases (Johnson, Dziurawiec, Ellis, & Morton, 1991) and demonstrating the ability to socially imitate facial expressions though they
have no experience seeing their own (Field, Woodson, Greenberg, & Cohen, 1982). This early engagement may solidify social bonds and focus the child on relevant social stimuli, but it may also result in negative reactions to another’s distress. For example, neonates contagiously cry in response to the distress of conspecifics in their proximity (Martin & Clark, 1982), a reaction which is heightened in response to another’s crying as opposed to the child’s own crying (Dondi, Simion, & Caltran, 1999). Due to its specificity and to the characteristics of affect sharing, it has been postulated that contagious crying is one of the earliest forms of empathic arousal. This affect sharing is mediated by subcortical pathways connecting the brainstem, superior colliculus, hypothalamus, pulvinar, and amygdala, which develop very early in fetal brain development (Decety, 2010a). Furthermore, babies as young as 3 months of age appear to respond to the affective state of their caregiver, demonstrating increased negative emotions if their mother shows signs of maternal depression (Cohn, Campbell, Matias, & Hopkins, 1990).

As infants develop and learn, they are increasingly able evaluate their social surroundings, even differentiating agents based on their social actions toward another. For example, 3–month olds preferentially attend to a character who previously acted in a prosocial (versus antisocial) manner (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2010), suggesting a partiality toward those that “do good things.” By 6 months of age, this visual preference is expanded to behaviors, where participants not only selectively attend to prosocial agents but also selectively approach them when paired with antisocial or neutral characters (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007; Hamlin & Wynn, 2011). By 15 months of age, some infants are able to evaluate the fairness of an agent in a third-party situation. In a recent study examining the relations between a visual violation of expectation task and behavior, it was found that infants who shared a toy they preferred (over a nonpreferred toy or no toy at all) also attended significantly longer to a third-party interaction in which the allocation of resources amongst conspecifics was unequal (Schmidt & Sommerville, 2011). This suggests that those infants who behaved altruistically also expanded their prosocial expectations to the interactions of others.

While the ability for young babies to prefer prosocial beings is fascinating, some argue that these findings emerge from innate biological reactions to social stimuli, almost reflexive in nature (Vaish & Warneken, 2012). The argument follows that the infant is responding positively to positive stimuli, and negatively to aversive stimuli, at an unconscious level. These reactions are precursors to a more cognitive empathy toward others. As children progress through the first few years of life, personal distress transforms to concern for others, as evidenced by helping and compassionate behaviors. These more complex prosocial behaviors often correlate with advancements in other areas of social development such as mirror self-recognition and self–other differentiation (Lewis, Sullivan, Stanger, & Weiss, 1989), rudimentary false-belief attribution (Baillargeon, Scott, & He, 2010), and emotional regulation (McGuigan & Nunez, 2006), lending credence to the theory that even early signs of morality involve communication between many systems.

Prosocial behaviors in the form of helping, sharing, and consoling emerge shortly after the first year of life. Early signs of helping behavior are reported in the toddler years, with 14- to 18-month olds fetching objects of desire that appear out of reach for an experimenter (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006) and helping to complete household chores (Rheingold, 1982). Other-oriented empathic responses to the distress of another have been observed from 8 to 16 months and continued to increase gradually into the second year
A Neurodevelopmental Perspective on Morality

Children between the ages of 1–2 years show increased comforting behaviors to those in distress (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992) and may go so far as to give up their own favorite objects as an empathetic gesture (Svetlova, Nichols, & Brownell, 2010). Furthermore, toddlers have been found to exhibit more concern toward the victim of a moral transgression than the transgressor, even if the victim did not show any behavioral markers of distress (Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2009), demonstrating that 18- to 25-month olds are not simply reacting to emotional displays but to the intentions and desires of others. Taken together, there is evidence that children under the age of 2 are already responding in socially appropriate ways when viewing others in distress.

By the preschool years, children begin to think and respond to moral events in more adult-like manners. They are able to more adequately assume another person’s perspective, and they respond to the distress of others not just with emotional discomfort but also with a feeling of sympathy and a need to help (Hoffman, 2007). They also have significantly more experience than their younger counterparts with socially and culturally appropriate moral behaviors. In fact, preschoolers are quite adept at verbally relating how to respond to a peer’s distress in a socially correct manner, even if they don’t behaviorally show such understanding (Caplan & Hay, 1989). Interestingly, these increases in social understanding do not always lead to increases in prosocial behaviors. During the preschool years, children become increasingly selective in their sharing of objects and in their responsiveness to others distress (Demetriou & Hay, 2004). Furthermore, unlike adults, preschoolers may not demonstrate social responsibility toward those in pain and often do not show evidence of reciprocity (Hay & Cook, 2007). Although it seems that even though young children understand many of the “rules” of moral behavior, they may be reluctant to put them into practice.

The increase in moral capabilities from infancy through the early childhood years may be a product not just of social experience but also of increased executive functioning capabilities underpinned by the prefrontal cortex, which continues to mature until late adolescence. As mentioned in the adult psychopathology literature, executive functions (including working memory, inhibition, planning, and attentional control) are often associated with moral understanding and behaviors. Although executive function research in infancy and early childhood is rare, results suggest that the development of these abilities follow closely in time with increased moral understanding. For example, the ability to inhibit one action in favor of another improves drastically around the second year of life (Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000), around the same time that children begin to inhibit their own emotional reactions to distress in favor of helping others. By the preschool years, there is evidence that executive function is highly correlated with increased theory of mind abilities, skills often found necessary for mature moral understanding (Moses, Carlson, & Breton, 2002). While there is ample research on the development of executive functioning in older children and adolescents, more research focusing on infancy and toddlerhood is necessary in order to fully understand the contributions of inhibitory abilities on moral development.

While many believe that very early prosocial behaviors indicate an innate kernel of morality, others argue that true moral understanding comes only with experience and social learning. The concept of moral learning through the social environment was originally...
made popular by Kohlberg’s stage theory (Kohlberg, 1984), and recent work has further supported these ideas. For example, parenting practices have long been insinuated as a force in moral development (Dunn, 2006; Smetana, 1999), with research demonstrating greater socioemotional development in toddlers who come from homes where mothers talk more about conflict resolution (Laible & Thompson, 2002), and higher levels of altruism in children who come from families with lots of emotional warmth (Brody & Shaffer, 1982). Furthermore, abused infants often respond to peers with anger, while securely attached infants exhibit attention and empathy (Main & George, 1985), suggesting that early experience may modulate how well children understand and regulate their own emotions, which in turn affects their ability to empathize with others.

Taken together, there is a bevy of research suggesting that mature morality is comprised of many underlying cognitive abilities that come online throughout development. Although social predispositions and empathetic markers exist, children’s behavior suggests that moral understanding is acquired over time and through extensive social experience. It is also possible that early precursors to morality and associated prosocial behaviors are in no way related to adult moral cognitions. Under this assumption, full moral abilities “turn on” at some point in development and function independently from other cognitive and regulatory capabilities. One way to further investigate and disentangle both the modular/general and innate/learned theories of morality is through neuroscientific methods. By using neurodevelopmental techniques, it is possible to examine whether infants and young children recruit specific areas of the brain when responding to moral material, or whether activation is more widespread, using areas that are also enlisted for other functions. Similarly, neuroscience allows us to examine whether the similar neural regions are recruited in childhood as adulthood, or whether the pattern of activation changes with age and experience.

**Neurodevelopmental Changes in Perceiving the Distress of Others**

As stated previously, human infants are biologically predisposed to emotionally resonate with the basic affective (positive and negative) states of others, the first step in the experience of empathy (Decety & Sveltova, 2012). Given the adaptive value of emotional contagion—the infant gains a rapid entrainment to the emotional states of those around her—this ability should not come as a surprise. When another individual is in distress or pain, empathic arousal is the process by which the perceiver becomes vicariously distressed.

In adults, a number of neuroimaging studies have documented reliable activation of a neural network involved in the processing of pain, involving the anterior midcingulate cortex (aMCC), anterior insular cortex, supplementary motor area (SMA), and periaqueductal gray area (PAG). Activation in this network has been elicited in response to watching facial expressions of pain, viewing body parts being injured, imagining the pain of others, or simply observing a signal indicating that someone will receive a painful stimulation (see Lamm, Decety, & Singer, 2011, for a meta-analysis).

It is worth noting that vicariously instigated activations of the pain matrix are not specific to the sensory qualities of pain but instead are associated with more general survival mechanisms such as aversion and withdrawal when exposed to danger and threat (Decety, 2010b). Based on a systematic review of neuroimaging studies that examined neural activity triggered by nociceptive stimuli, it has been proposed that activity of this cortical
network reflects a system involved in detecting, processing, and reacting to the occurrence of salient sensory events regardless of the sensory channel through which these events are conveyed. This activation may reflect basic operations by which the brain detects stimuli that can represent a potential threat for the integrity of the self (Legrain et al., 2011). Of particular importance, the aMCC (a region that implements a domain-general process that is integral to negative affect, pain, and cognitive control) contains pain-responsive neurons that are activated by both anticipation of pain and instrumental escape from pain (Shackman et al., 2011).

One cross-sectional developmental fMRI study tested participants ranging from 7 to 40 years of age while they watched video clips of individuals being physically injured either accidentally or intentionally by another (Decety & Michalska, 2010). Participants’ subjective evaluations of the situations indicated a gradual decrease in the judgment of pain intensity for both conditions (accidental and intentional pain) across age, with younger participants rating the scenarios as significantly more painful than older participants. Interestingly, the younger the participants in age, the stronger the amygdala, posterior insula, and medial vmPFC were recruited when they watched others in painful situations. A significant negative correlation between age and degree of neuro-hemodynamic response was found in the posterior insula. In contrast, a positive correlation was found in the anterior portion of the insula. A posterior-to-anterior progression of increasingly complex representations in the human insula is thought of as providing a foundation for the sequential integration of the individual homeostatic condition with one’s sensory environment, and motivational condition (Craig, 2003). The posterior insula receives inputs from the ventromedial nucleus of the thalamus, an area that is highly specialized to convey emotional and homeostatic information, and serves as a primary sensory cortex for both of these distinct interoceptive feelings from the body. The fact that, in response to others’ physical distress, younger participants recruited the posterior portion of the insula, in conjunction with the amygdala and medial vmPFC, more than adults did may speak to the children’s tendency to be aroused by the perception of others’ distress in a more direct sense. This in turn may lead to a heightened experience of discomfort associated with a visceral response to a potential threat, whereas adult participants tend to use more abstract secondary representations of pain when perceiving others in distress.

Interestingly, this study also found that an increase in age correlated with a greater signal change in the prefrontal regions, such as the dlPFC and IFG, which are involved in cognitive control and response inhibition (Aron, Robbins, & Poldrack, 2004). This developmental pattern reflects the frontalization of regulatory capacities, providing increasing top-down modulation of emotion processing, especially on amygdala reactivity to aversive stimuli (Yurgelun-Todd, 2007). Similarly, age-related change was observed in the vmPFC in response to the pain inflicted by another, shifting activation from the medial portion in younger participants to the lateral portion in older participants. The vmPFC has intrinsic networks that are defined on the basis of their cortico-cortical connections and also connections with other parts of the cerebral cortex and subcortical structures. These connections extend to the mediodorsal nucleus of the thalamus, sensory areas, and virtually all limbic structures (including the amygdala and brainstem), each subserving distinct functions. Since the medial part of vmPFC is involved in regulating both motor and visceral responses, and its lateral part is involved in executive control of emotion reactivity,
(Hurliman, Nagode, & Pardo, 2005), this pattern of developmental change is indicative of a gradual shift from the monitoring of somatovisceral responses in young children to a more cognitive evaluative level associated with executive control of higher-order emotion processing in older participants.

The strong engagement of the amygdala, PAG, insula, and vmPFC during the perception of others’ distress in children is consistent with the timing of their structural maturation. These reciprocally interconnected regions, which underlie rapid and prioritized processing of emotion signals, involved in affective arousal and somatovisceral resonance, come online much early in ontogeny. In contrast, the dorsal and lateral vmPFC undergo considerable maturation during the childhood years and become progressively specialized for the evaluation of social stimuli (Paus, 2011). These latter regions of the prefrontal cortex are vital for more advanced forms of empathy, linked with perspective taking and mentalizing.

Overall, findings from that study indicate there are important developmental changes in the functional organization of the neural structures implicated in empathic arousal. These changes occur over an extended period from childhood, and likely infancy, through adulthood.

**Age-Related Changes in Brain Circuits Involved in Moral Cognition**

There is at the moment only one study that has investigated the neurodevelopmental changes in response to morally laden stimuli, by combining behavioral evaluations, eye-tracking, and neuro-hemodynamic response to short animated visual scenarios in a large sample of individuals whose ages ranged from 4 to 37 years (Decety, Michalska, & Kinzler, 2012). The scenarios were categorized along a 2 × 2 factorial design to distinguish participants’ responses to perceiving people or objects being injured/damaged; these injuries occurred either via intentional or unintentional actions. The latter factor of intentionality is a particularly critical aspect because detecting intentionality is the decisive cue in determining whether an action is malicious or not (Cushman 2008; Malle & Guglielmo, 2012).

After scanning, participants were presented with the same stimuli that they saw in the scanner and were asked to rate whether the action performed by the perpetrator in the video clip was intentional or not. They were then asked to respond to a set of questions probing moral judgment (wrongness and punishment), empathic concern for the victim, personal distress, and understanding of the perpetrator’s mental state.

In all participants, irrespective of their age, perceived intentional harm to people (as opposed to accidental harm) was associated with increased activation in brain regions sensitive to the perception, prediction, and interpretation of others’ intentions such as the right pSTS/TPJ (Blakemore et al., 2003), as well as regions processing the affective consequences of these actions, namely the temporal poles, insula, vmPFC, and amygdala. The more participants reported being upset about harmful actions, the higher the activity in the amygdala. The younger the participants, the greater the empathic sadness for the victim of harm. Ratings of sadness for the victim correlated with activity in the insula, thalamus, and subgenual prefrontal cortex. This latter region has extensive connections with circuits implicated in emotional behavior and autonomic/neuroendocrine response to stressors, including the amygdala, lateral hypothalamus, and brainstem serotoninergic, noradrenergic, and dopaminergic nuclei (Drevets et al., 1997). Damage to this region is associated with
abnormal autonomic responses to emotional experiences and impaired comprehension of the adverse consequences of pernicious social behaviors (Bechara et al., 1996).

The signal change in the amygdala appeared to follow a curvilinear function, such that the signal is highest at the youngest ages, decreases rapidly through childhood and early adolescence, and asymptotes in late adolescence through adulthood (Figure 21.2). Conversely, the neuro-hemodynamic signal in older participants increased in the mPFC and vmPFC, regions that are associated with meta-cognitive representations and decision making and that enable us to reflect on the values linked to outcomes and actions (see Figure 21.2).

Patterns of functional connectivity during the perception of intentional harm relative to accidental harm showed complementary evidence for increased integration between prefrontal cortex and amygdala during development. Changes in functional integration between vmPFC and amygdala were observed, such that the older participants showed significant coactivation in these regions during the perception of intentional harm relative to accidental harm. 

![Figure 21.2](image)

**Figure 21.2** Examples of the stimuli depicting people being harmed intentionally (A) or by accident (B) by another individual. Amygdala activation resulting from the contrast between intentional harm versus accidental harm (C), and age-related decrease (D). Age-related hemodynamic increase (F) in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (E) when participants perceive scenarios depicting people being harmed intentionally versus accidentally.

*Credit:* Adapted from Decety, Michalska, & Kinzler (2012) with permission.
to accidental harm, whereas the youngest children only exhibited a significant covariation between the vmPFC and PAG. Furthermore, adult participants showed the strongest connectivity between vmPFC and pSTS/TPJ while viewing moral relative to nonmoral actions than the younger participants, suggestive of developmental changes in functional integration within the mentalizing system (Figure 21.3).

Neurodevelopmental changes during the perception of morally laden situations are clearly seen in structures that are implicated in emotion saliency (amygdala and insula), with a gradual decrease in activation with age. Conversely, activity in regions of the medial and ventral prefrontal cortex that are reciprocally connected with the amygdala, and that are involved in decision making and evaluation, increases with age, and these regions become more functionally coupled. This pattern of developmental change is reflected in moral evaluations, which require the capacity to integrate a representation of the mental states of others together with the consequences of their actions (Leslie, Knobe, & Cohen, 2006). While judgments of wrongness did not change across age—all participants rated intentional harm as more wrong than accidental harm—when asked about the malevolence of the agent, subjects’ evaluations indicated a more differentiated appraisal with age.

Figure 21.3  On the left, schematic drawing showing the regions that were activated by morally laden visual scenarios (intentional harm) in whole group analyses with the dashed black arrows representing the anatomical connectivity between these regions. Importantly, several regions that play a critical role in emotion processing showed decreasing activity with age, while other regions computing affective and cognitive evaluations, showed an age-related increase (adapted with permission from Decety, Michalska, & Kinzler, 2012). This circuit of recursively connected regions highlights the cognitive–affective nature of moral reasoning. Functional connectivity analyses (dashed dark arrows), seeded in the vmPFC, showed greater functional connectivity with the PAG in early childhood (4–7 years of age), while in young adults (18–25 years of age), vmPFC increased its connectivity with amygdala and pSTS/TPJ when participants viewed intentional harm. On the right, an illustration of the major brain regions associated with moral reasoning and empathy.

Credit: Courtesy of Jorge Moll.
Whereas young children considered all agents malicious, irrespective of intention and targets (i.e., people and objects), older participants perceived the perpetrator as clearly less mean when carrying out an accidental action, and even more so when the target was an object. Ratings of deserved punishment changed similarly with age. As age increased, participants punished an agent who damaged an object less severely than an agent who harmed a person. Though even young children attend to both intentionality and target in guiding their own empathic responses and judgment of wrongness, an increased discrimination of intentionality and target in determining moral culpability with age is seemingly consistent with the developmental shift in moral judgment dominated by a focus on outcomes to the integration of both intent to harm and consequences (see Figure 21.3).

Overall, these results highlight the importance of affect in the development of morality (Blair & Blair, 2009), which has consequences for theories of moral cognition. The fact that morally laden stimuli evoked stronger empathic sadness in younger participants, while being equally upsetting for all participants, combined with an enhanced response in neural networks coding affective saliency, stronger for young children, supports the notion that emotion plays a critical role in guiding the development trajectory of our moral capacities (Hoffman, 2007). These findings are also consistent with the view that morality is instantiated by functionally integrating several distributed areas/networks including the amygdala, medial and ventromedial prefrontal cortex, and pSTS, underpinning complex computational interactions between cognition and affect. Involvement of these regions and functional interactions between them change over time.

In another recent study, 51 healthy male participants age 13–53 were scanned while viewing International Affective Picture System (IAPS) pictures that did or did not depict situations considered to represent moral violations and were asked to rate their degree of moral violation severity (Harenski et al., 2012). Making decisions about the severity of pictures depicting moral violations was associated with increased amygdala, right IFG, pSTS, and posterior cingulate cortex activity in adolescents and adults. The magnitude of activity in the pSTS was positively correlated with age. Given the role of this region in mentalizing, and that its underlying neural substrates undergo extensive developmental changes from adolescence to adulthood, the authors hypothesized that adolescents use these types of inferences less during moral judgment than do adults.

Conclusions

The developmental neuroscience of moral cognition is a new exciting area that has the potential to improve our understanding of a complex human ability. In this chapter we have presented and considered converging evidence from developmental psychology and affective and clinical neuroscience as a way of highlighting the importance of emotional processing in moral sensitivity and moral judgment. A lack of empathic arousal and atypical emotion processing contribute to impaired moral judgment, as seems to be the case with juvenile and adult psychopaths. However, the necessity of emotion for moral cognition, at least for care-based morality, does not mean that it alone is sufficient for the possession of a moral concept and moral behavior. Extensive research in psychology has demonstrated that moral cognition depends on the engagement of several computational processes, including intention understanding, conceptual knowledge, emotions, and motivation, requiring an
integration among many separate systems (Killen & Smetana, 2008). Neuroimaging work with children and adults supports this theoretical perspective, documenting the specific neural circuitry involved in moral understanding, but noting that is circuit is not unique to morality; rather, moral behavior involves regions and systems underlying specific states of feelings and cognitive and motivational processes. The neural mechanisms that support moral cognition evolve and are increasingly interconnected over the course of development and are embodied in specific social contexts to produce adaptive social behavior. Importantly, the functioning of the relationships between the amygdala, insula, and vmPFC enables a critical form of learning necessary to care about the welfare of others, and informs moral decision making.

The rise of developmental neuroscience enables a more objective and empirically based approach to morality research. Much is to be gained from collaborative approaches across moral psychology and moral neuroscience. As suggested by Killen and Smetana (2008), the developmental research on moral judgments can benefit the neuroscience research by providing a theoretical grounding for the definition, identification, and measurement of the moral domain. Likewise, moral neuroscience research has the potential to refine moral developmental theory and to provide new insights about moral judgment and decision making.

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A Neurodevelopmental Perspective on Morality


Searching for the Evolutionary Roots of Human Morality

Keith Jensen and Joan B. Silk

Foundations: The Role of Comparative Evidence

Humans, like all other organisms, have an evolutionary history, and many important events in our history have been documented by paleontologists who study the fossil record, and by molecular geneticists who sequence our genes. The challenge faced by researchers studying the evolutionary origins of morality is that behavior and cognition do not leave traces in the fossil record and cannot be extracted from DNA. However, we can gain some understanding of the evolutionary roots of morality by comparing ourselves to other closely related organisms. Evolutionary biologists generally reason that if two closely related species share a particular trait, then it is likely that they inherited the trait from their most recent common ancestor. Thus, if humans share a characteristic with chimpanzees (Pan troglodytes), such as the absence of a tail, then it is likely that the same trait characterized our most recent common ancestor, which lived about 5–7 million years ago. On the other hand, if humans possess a trait, such as bipedalism, which chimpanzees and other great apes do not display, we can be reasonably confident that this trait evolved after the human and chimpanzee lineages diverged.

Based on this logic, our goal is to consider whether humans share any of the features of morality with other members of the primate order, particularly the great apes. We do not expect to find codes of conduct prescribed by society, but it is possible that some components of morality, such as a concern for the welfare of others, might be found in other species (Flack & de Waal, 2000). The presence of these traits among other great apes would imply that these capacities were also present in the most recent common ancestor of humans and the great apes. The absence of these traits in other great apes would suggest that these capacities arose after the lineages diverged. We focus on the extant species most closely related to humans to help us understand when and how the foundations of human morality evolved. The foundations, notably moral sentiments (Smith, 1759), may also have arisen through convergent evolution in more distantly related species, but we are concerned here with the phylogenetic roots of modern human behavior.
We begin by briefly reviewing the evolutionary processes that are thought to give rise to altruism in nature, as well as punishment and a sense of fairness. All are important for discussions of moral evolution because of their role in maintaining cooperation. We review the evidence for altruistic and punitive behavior focusing mainly on evidence from nonhuman primates in the wild. Behavioral observations provide good evidence that altruism is relatively common in nature, but observations alone provide little insight about the mechanisms that underlie these behaviors. It is, therefore, not clear whether the behaviors we see are driven by the same kinds of moral sentiments that motivate cooperation and third-party punishment in humans. For insights about the substrates for altruism and other social behaviors, we turn to a body of experimental research that seeks to understand the mechanisms and preferences that underlie prosocial and antisocial behavior in nonhuman primates. This work focuses on the existence of empathy, preferences for outcomes that benefit others, aversion to inequity, and the willingness to impost costly punishment on others. Before we turn to the empirical evidence, it is important to establish working definitions of several key terms.

Key Terms

Evolutionary biologists and social scientists often use the same terms for different purposes, and this has created some misunderstandings among researchers in different disciplines, who focus on different levels of explanation (Bshary & Bergmüller, 2008; West, Griffin, & Gardner, 2007). Ultimate explanations deal with the evolution of traits (adaptive function and phylogenetic history), and proximate explanations are concerned with the immediate causes (development history and psychological mechanisms; Laland, Sterelny, Odling-Smee, Hoppitt, & Uller, 2011; Mayr, 1961; Tinbergen, 1963). Ultimate (or why) causes and proximate (how) causes complement each other, but confusion arises over different uses of the same terms (Laland et al., 2011). Evolutionary biologists, who are concerned with the ultimate function of behavioral traits and predispositions, define altruism and spite in terms of the fitness consequences for individuals. Altruistic behaviors reduce the genetic fitness of the actor and increase the genetic fitness of the recipient, and may be favored by kin selection (Hamilton, 1964) or some form of reciprocal altruism (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981; Trivers, 1971). Spiteful behaviors reduce the genetic fitness of both actor and recipient. Although natural selection is generally not expected to favor spiteful behaviors, it may favor punishment that imposes immediate costs on both actor and recipient, but generates delayed benefits for the actor (negative reciprocity; Clutton-Brock & Parker, 1995; Raihani, Thornton, & Bshary, 2012). In this chapter we focus mainly on altruism and spite (including punishment). We say less about mutualistic interactions in which both parties gain immediate benefits (see Vaish and Tomasello, this volume).

The biological definitions of altruism, spite, and punishment are silent about the motives, intentions, and psychological predispositions that underlie behavior. In contrast, psychologists—and to some degree, economists—are mainly concerned with the proximate factors, including cognition, motives, and preferences, that influence decisions and shape behavioral outcomes. For these scholars, altruism, spite, and punishment are defined in terms of motives and preferences of the actor (Jensen, 2010; Jensen & Tomasello, 2010). Thus, altruists may be motivated by their concern for the welfare of others (Batson, 1991),
and they may demonstrate this concern by exhibiting preferences for outcomes that benefit others (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003).

Individuals routinely make decisions that guide their behaviors, and we say that they have preferences when they consistently choose one option over another. For example, if you routinely ask for pepperoni when you order pizza, but never ask for mushrooms, then we can infer you prefer pepperoni over mushrooms on your pizza. Other-regarding preferences are particularly important for moral behavior because they take the consequences for others into account. Having a preference for pepperoni over mushrooms is blind to the consequences for the pizza toppings. Other-regarding preferences are sensitive to the consequences of choices on the welfare of other individuals, and concern about these consequences guides choices between outcomes. Other-regarding preferences are positive (or prosocial) when they generate preferences for outcomes that enhance the welfare of others, and negative (or antisocial) when they lead to preferences for outcomes that reduce the welfare of others.

Other-regarding concerns are emotions or sentiments that are attuned to the emotions and welfare of others and motivate behavior and moral judgments (Jensen, 2012a, 2012b; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Silk & House, 2011). Like other-regarding preferences, other-regarding concerns can be positive or negative. Positive other-regarding concerns include empathy (sadness at the sadness and misfortunes of others) and symhedonia (happiness derived from the happiness and good fortunes of others). Negative other-regarding sentiments include envy (unhappiness derived from the happiness of others) and schadenfreude (joy derived from the misfortunes of others).

Altruism in Primates

There is a strong consensus that kin selection has played an important role in the evolution of altruism in primate groups (reviewed in Langergraber, 2012; Silk, 2009b). The distribution of altruistic behaviors, such as grooming, coalitionary aggression, alloparental care, and food sharing, are consistently biased in favor of close maternal kin. In some primate groups, there are also strong biases in favor of age mates. Such preferences may be the product of kin selection because in species with high male reproductive skew, peers are likely to be sired by the same male and will, therefore, be paternal half siblings (Altmann, 1979).

There is considerably less agreement about the importance of contingent reciprocity in primate groups. Monkeys and apes generally spend the most time grooming those from whom they receive the most grooming (Schino & Aureli, 2007), and several recent studies indicate that grooming is more evenly balanced across multiple bouts than within single bouts (Frank & Silk, 2009; Gomes, Mundry, & Boesch, 2009; Schino, Di Giuseppe, & Visalberghi, 2009). Monkeys might trade grooming for other kinds of resources, such as access to newborn infants (Frank & Silk, 2009; Henzi & Barrett, 2002; Maestripieri, 1994; Manson, 1999), support from higher ranking and more powerful partners (Seyfarth, 1977; Seyfarth & Cheney, 1984), or tolerance (Barrett, Henzi, Weingrill, Lycett, & Hill, 1999; Fairbanks, 1980; Silk, 1982). Male chimpanzees seem to trade grooming for food, particularly meat, agonistic aid, participation in border patrols, and mating opportunities (Duffy, Wrangham, & Silk, 2007; Muller & Mitani, 2005).
Correlations between behaviors given and received within dyads do not provide direct evidence that grooming is contingent on previous acts of cooperation by the partner. Stronger evidence of contingency comes from several naturalistic experiments. Seyfarth and Cheney (1984) found that wild vervet monkeys (Chlorocebus aethiops) were more attentive to the tape-recorded distress calls of other group members if they had been groomed recently by the caller than if they had not been groomed recently by the same monkey. Similar patterns have also been documented among baboons (Papio hamadryas ursinus; Cheney, Moscovice, Heesen, Mundry, & Seyfarth, 2010). After disputes over food were instigated by researchers, long-tailed macaques (Macaca fascicularis) were more likely to intervene on behalf of monkeys who had recently groomed them than monkeys who had not groomed them (Hemelrijk, 1994). Grooming also enhances feeding tolerance among chimpanzees, as demonstrated in an experiment in which chimpanzees were more tolerant of sharing leafy branches with individuals that had previously groomed them than they were of other individuals (de Waal, 1997). Although these studies suggest that chimpanzees and other primates cooperate in a contingent way, more formal experimental tests of contingent cooperation with chimpanzees in the laboratory have produced negative results (Brosnan & Beran, 2009; Melis, Hare, & Tomasello, 2008; Yamamoto & Tanaka, 2009). It is possible that the experiments did not evoke the psychology that underlies contingent cooperation in nature, but it is also possible that behavior in more naturalistic settings has been misclassified as contingent reciprocity. At present, it is not certain whether reciprocity can explain altruism in the field, and these observations cannot tell us the psychological mechanisms underpinning the behaviors.

Punishment in Primates

Cooperation has long been recognized as a problem for the theory of evolution by natural selection: Individuals who pay a cost to the benefit of others will go extinct, since they will be at a disadvantage to individuals who reap the benefits without the costs (Darwin, 1871). In the evolutionary literature, as well as in economics at the proximate level, punishment is an effective means of maintaining cooperation (or any behavior, for that matter: Boyd & Richerson, 1992; Panchanathan & Boyd, 2004). In the absence of punishment, free riders and cheaters exploit cooperators, causing cooperation to decline dramatically (for an example from economics, see Fehr & Gächter, 2002).

There are a number of accounts of animals harming others for immediate personal gain (coercion), but little compelling evidence for punishment that produces delayed benefits, at least in nonhuman primates (Jensen, 2010; Jensen & Tomasello, 2010; Raihani, et al., 2012). There is only one study in which researchers attempted to determine whether the failure to reciprocate grooming or support led to elevated levels of aggression, and no evidence was found to suggest that chimpanzees systematically targeted nonreciprocators (Koyama, Caws, & Aureli, 2006). In an experimental study, chimpanzees punished individuals who pulled a food tray away from them and thereby caused the thief to lose food (Jensen, Call, & Tomasello, 2007a). But in contrast to human studies in which punishment (paying a cost so that targets experience a greater loss) increases levels of cooperative behavior across trials (e.g., in the public goods game: Fehr & Gächter, 2002), in chimpanzees,
rates of theft increased while punishment decreased across trials even though there was no tangible cost for the punisher.

A difficulty with punishment as described above is that the punisher benefits directly. Such negative reciprocity or second-party punishment is different than coercion and dominance in that benefits to the punisher are delayed, but because the punisher stands to receive personal gains, the behavior can still be coercive in the end. One cannot be certain that improvement of the behavior of noncooperators is the primary goal. The role of second-party punishment in morality is therefore dubious. However, when punishment is initiated by a third party who is not involved in the original transgression, such considerations are largely moot. Third-party punishment plays an important role in human groups, particularly in large-scale societies (Marlowe & Berbesque, 2008; Mathew & Boyd, 2011). In economic experiments, some people pay a cost to punish individuals whom they have observed behaving ungenerously toward others (Henrich, et al., 2006), and they also punish others when they have personally been treated unfairly, even though they will not benefit themselves in future interactions with the (potentially) reformed free rider (Fehr & Gächter, 2002).

In addition, in the public goods game mentioned above, individuals who punish free riders do not encounter that individual in future rounds of the game; any improvements in behavior go to others. This has hence been called altruistic punishment (Fehr & Gächter, 2002). There is some debate about whether altruistic punishment is, indeed, altruistic (e.g., Dreber, Rand, Fudenberg, & Nowak, 2008; Herrmann, Thöni, & Gächter, 2008), that is, on the psychological level, whether the punisher intends for others to benefit, and whether cooperation does increase as a result. Details of these debates aside, third-party punishment plays an important role in human policing and laws, and is of importance to discussions of morality.

There is no convincing evidence of third-party punishment in other primates. Some types of intervention in conflicts have been interpreted as a form of third-party punishment. For example, chimpanzees and other primates sometimes intervene in conflicts within their groups (Flack, de Waal, & Krakauer, 2005; Flack, Girvan, de Waal, & Krakauer, 2006; von Rohr et al., 2012), and it has been suggested that powerful individuals may use these interventions to control aggression and punish aggressors (Bernstein & Ehardt, 1986; Clutton-Brock & Parker, 1995; Watts, 2000). This form of third-party intervention has been called policing (Flack et al., 2005; Flack et al. 2006; von Rohr, et al. 2012), which is suggestive of third-party punishment. Flack et al. (2006), for example, found that levels of conflict rose after a dominant male was removed from a group of pigtailed macaques (Macaca nemestrina). The effects of removing the adult male were greater than the effects of removing a low-ranking female from the group. However, elevated levels of conflict might represent a response to changes in the group’s power structure, not to the absence of interventions or punitive behavior by a particular individual. Moreover, these interventions might have direct, personally beneficial outcomes. For example, males might be trying to protect females with whom they are likely to mate in the future or immatures that they have fathered in the past.

In an effort to determine whether chimpanzees would take advantage of opportunities to punish transgressions against third parties, Riedl, Jensen, Call, and Tomasello (2012) conducted an experiment in which one chimpanzee (the “observer”) witnessed another chimpanzee (the “thief”) take food from a third chimpanzee (the “victim”). The observer
was able to deprive the thief of food by collapsing the table that held the food. Observers showed no inclination to punish thieves, even when they were dominant to the thief (and did not have to fear retaliation) or closely related to the victim (and likely motivated by kin selection to help them in other contexts). However, the same chimpanzees acted punitively when they were themselves victimized by subordinates (for similar results, see Jensen, Call, & Tomasello 2007a). These findings suggest that chimpanzees use punitive behavior to deter transgressions against themselves, but not to deter transgressions against others.

Differences Between Cooperation in Humans and Other Primates

Cooperation in nonhuman primate groups differs from human cooperation in a number of important ways. In nonhuman primate groups, cooperative interactions involve relatively small numbers of group members, often close relatives or reciprocating partners. Grooming usually involves pairs of individuals, and coalitional alliances rarely involve more than three or four individuals on a side. Even when groups participate in territorial encounters, the number of active participants is usually less than two dozen individuals. Moreover, collective action problems seem to limit the effectiveness of group-level cooperation in intergroup encounters (Crofoot & Gilby, 2012; Crofoot, Gilby, Wikelski, & Kays, 2008). However, human hunter–gatherer societies can orchestrate cooperative activities involving hundreds, sometimes thousands, of individuals (Boyd & Richerson, 2009; Henrich, 2004a; Mathew & Boyd, 2011).

Humans also differ from nonhuman primates in the costs of altruistic acts, whether cost is measured in terms of lost resources or decrements to fitness. Most of the altruistic acts that we observe in nature, such as grooming or agonistic support, impose only modest costs on actors. Humans, in contrast, sometimes perform costly altruistic behaviors on behalf of strangers, such as giving blood or organ donations, participating in demonstrations against repressive regimes, and going to war.

In nonhuman primates, responses to strangers and members of neighboring groups generally range from passive avoidance to active hostility (Crofoot & Wrangham, 2010). Members of different residential groups rarely groom or affiliate, and there are no reports of groups forming coalitions against other groups. When individuals move from one group to another, they largely sever their ties with their natal groups. Although hostility between groups is a common feature of human societies, and may have had an important impact on human evolution (Bowles, 2009; Choi & Bowles, 2007), groups that are linked by marriage often form lasting alliances (Chapais, 2010), and in market economies, goods and services are commonly traded among strangers (Henrich, et al., 2010). In human societies, people who violate social norms are often sanctioned by other group members. Although nonhuman primates may take punitive action when they are victimized themselves, they do not seem to take action when others are victimized.

Proximate Mechanisms That Underlie Altruistic and Punitive Behavior

Observational studies provide important information about the scope, extent, and limits of altruistic behavior among nonhuman primates but offer little direct evidence about the psychological mechanisms, motives, and preferences that underlie altruism. We are
particularly interested in the psychological mechanisms that drive altruistic interactions because these behaviors do not promote the actor’s short-term welfare and cannot be motivated by immediate self-interest. In contrast, mutualistic interactions generate immediate benefits for individuals, and need not rely on benefits accrued through inclusive fitness or delayed reciprocity (though these could certainly present interesting cognitive challenges; Vaish & Tomasello, this volume). Altruism presents a more challenging evolutionary problem than mutualism, and the proximate mechanisms that underlie altruistic behavior are of particular interest.

As social psychologists, behavioral economists, and developmental psychologists have amply demonstrated (as seen in this handbook), experiments provide important tools for probing the proximate mechanisms that shape altruistic responses. And, as we pointed out earlier, the pattern of choices that individuals make provide useful insights about their preferences. If individuals are confronted with alternatives that affect the welfare of others, their choices may reveal the existence of preferences for outcomes that affect others.

**Positive Other-Regarding Preferences**

If individuals have positive other-regarding preferences, they would be expected to take advantage of low-cost opportunities to provide benefits or services to others. A number of experiments have been designed to assess other primates’ willingness to help others. The first study of this kind showed that young chimpanzees retrieved out-of-reach objects and returned them to familiar caretakers (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006). These results suggest that the chimpanzees were able to distinguish between situations in which their help was needed and when it was not, and were motivated to provide help. One problem with studies of this sort (see also Warneken, Hare, Melis, Hanus, & Tomasello, 2007) is that chimpanzees are often rewarded for handing things back to their caretakers, and their responses in these experiments could have been due to this training. In contrast, when captive capuchin monkeys (Cebus apella) were given the opportunity to help a human experimenter retrieve an out-of-reach object, they did not consistently do so, and unlike chimpanzees, they were strongly motivated by the availability of immediate rewards (Barnes, Hill, Langer, Martinez, & Santos, 2008).

Chimpanzees’ willingness to provide help to humans may not provide an accurate reflection of their attitudes toward conspecifics. To address this, some experimenters have given chimpanzees and bonobos (Pan paniscus) the opportunity to provide help to familiar conspecifics. Warneken et al. (2007) created a situation in which one chimpanzee was able to help another chimpanzee gain access to a locked room by removing a peg. The locked room contained food rewards, which were not visible or accessible to the actor. Actors were more likely to help recipients in the test condition than in a control condition in which the recipient did not want to get into the locked room. Chimpanzees also provide tools that others need to access rewards (Yamamoto, Humle, & Tanaka, 2009). One chimpanzee needed a cane to pull in an out-of-reach juice box, but had a drinking straw, and the other chimpanzee in the adjacent enclosure had a juice box and a cane, but no straw. Even with other distractor items around, the chimpanzees gave their partners the items they needed to get their rewards. Importantly, prompts from the partners were needed to initiate the handing over of the necessary tool; chimpanzees did not do so spontaneously,
nor did they engage in reciprocal exchanges. Helpful responses by chimpanzees have also been observed in other experimental settings in which one individual could manipulate an apparatus to deliver food or nonfood rewards to others (Greenberg, Hamann, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2010; Melis et al., 2010). These studies have been interpreted to mean that, like humans, chimpanzees have the abilities and motivations to help others (e.g., Melis et al., 2010). However, even in those types of studies, chimpanzees only helped if the recipient signaled a need for help or struggled to achieve a goal. Burkart, Fehr, Efferson, and van Schaik (2007) argue that prosociality motivated out of a concern for others should be spontaneous. In the case of chimpanzees, solicitation may make the goals of the recipients clear, but it seems surprising that the helpers do not infer goals based on past experience (i.e., that other chimpanzees want food; see Yamamoto et al., 2012).

While it may be the case that chimpanzees and other nonhuman primates recognize something of the goals of others, it is not entirely clear that they are motivated out of a concern for others. If they were motivated and able to help others, then we would expect nonhuman primates to consistently choose outcomes that confer benefits on their partners over outcomes do not. A series of experiments have been conducted in which chimpanzees are presented with a pair of options that differ in their impact on conspecifics. These experiments are modeled on the dictator game, in which one player is given a sum of money (endowment), which can be shared with an anonymous partner (Camerer & Thaler, 1995). As is typically done with humans engaged in economic experiments, players are anonymous and do not play each other repeatedly. In the absence of potential reciprocity and reputation benefits, a purely self-regarding person is expected to keep the full endowment. Yet people often allocate about 20–30% of their endowment to others, strangers whom they never meet (Camerer, 2003).

Researchers have presented monkeys and apes with simplified versions of the dictator game (the prosocial game) that gives actors a choice between selfish and prosocial outcomes. In the selfish choice, the actor receives a food reward, but the other individual gets nothing (1/0). In the mutualistic choice, both individuals get identical rewards (1/1). This payoff distribution differs from the standard dictator game because the actor does not have to sacrifice rewards to deliver rewards to others, but it does reveal whether animals are sensitive to outcomes affecting others. A positive other-regarding preference would exist if subjects were more likely to choose the 1/1 outcome in the test condition when there was a partner who could benefit than in a nonsocial control in which no one could get the reward. Experiments based on the prosocial game have now been conducted in five captive chimpanzee populations. In four of these populations, the chimpanzees did not consistently distinguish between the test and control condition (Jensen, Hare, Call, & Tomasello, 2006; Silk et al., 2005; Vonk et al., 2008; Yamamoto & Tanaka, 2010). That is, the animals were no more likely to choose the 1/1 (mutualistic) option when another chimpanzee was present to receive rewards than when they were alone. In one case, chimpanzees were also presented with a choice between 0/0 (spiteful) and 0/1 (altruistic), and again did not distinguish between the test and control conditions (Jensen et al., 2006). The implication is that chimpanzees are neither selectively selfish nor prosocial—they are utterly indifferent to outcomes that affect others. In a fifth population, chimpanzees tested on a different paradigm showed preferences for outcomes that benefited others (Horner, Carter, Suchak, & de Waal, 2011). Subjects could choose between pairs of tokens offered by the experimenter,
one of which produced a selfish outcome and the other of which was mutualistic. Rewards were delivered in wrappers to make the sight of food less salient. The chimpanzees chose the token that produced the mutualistic outcome more often when there was another chimpanzee in the adjacent enclosure than when they were alone.

One suggestion is that food interferes with sharing in prosocial games because food is normally a limited resource, and chimpanzees do not share food freely in the wild (Warneken & Tomasello, 2009). However, in an experiment designed to test this hypothesis, food did not interfere with helping behavior—whether a recipient was trying to reach a cup (which could be used to get juice) or a piece of food had no effect on how much help he received (Melis et al. 2010).

Perhaps there might be different patterns of helping and sharing in species in which food sharing is more common, such as the cooperatively breeding New World monkeys (Burkart et al., 2007). Even here, though, results are not consistent. While common marmosets (Callithrix jacchus) were more likely to deliver rewards to partners in the test condition than in a nonsocial control condition (Burkart et al., 2007), cottontop tamarins (Saguinus oedipus) did not (Cronin, Schroeder, Rothwell, Silk, & Snowdon, 2009; Stevens, 2010 however, see Cronin, Schroeder, and Snowdon 2010). Moreover, capuchins, which do not breed cooperatively, seem to prefer outcomes that benefit others in several variants of the prosocial game (de Waal, Leimgruber, & Greenberg, 2008; Lakshminarayanan & Santos, 2008; Takimoto, Kuroshima, & Fujita, 2010).

It is not yet clear why nonhuman primates seem to behave so differently in experimental studies in which they have the opportunity to help others and the experiments in which they must choose between selfish and generous options. It may be that in helping studies, they are responding to coercive signals, exhibiting overtrained behaviors, or responding out of interest in unusual events in their environment. On the other hand, the choice tasks may be more cognitively demanding than the single-action helping studies, and this may override their ability to attend to the needs of others. It is notable that the level of helping behavior, that is, the likelihood that actors will deliver rewards or help to their partners in test trials, is quite similar across the full set of experiments (Silk & House, 2011). Chimpanzees behave in a prosocial way in about 40–60% of trials. Clearly, more work is needed to determine why chimpanzees and other nonhuman primates respond differently across these experimental paradigms.

Negative Other-Regarding Preferences

Both theory and experimental evidence suggest that a propensity for punishment, particularly third-party punishment, is important in stabilizing cooperation against the degrading effects of cheaters and free riders in human groups. Of particular importance is a sensitivity to being treated unfairly, treating others unfairly, and seeing people being treated unfairly. Fairness is a fundamental part of human morality (Rawls, 2001), and its emergence in childhood has long been a topic of interest for developmental psychologists (Hook & Cook, 1979; Killen & Cooley, this volume; Piaget, 1932; Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, this volume). A preference for fairness goes against standard economic theories of pure self-interest (e.g., Fehr & Schmidt, 1999), but people routinely engage in “irrational” behaviors, presumably out of a sense of fairness. While the details of what constitutes
fairness vary across human populations (Henrich et al., 2005), fairness considerations do appear to be widespread. People are inclined to compare themselves to others (Festinger, 1954) and will pay costs to restore fairness. Doing so is especially puzzling when one is better off than others; advantageous inequity aversion might motivate prosocial behavior such as sharing in a dictator game. Perhaps less puzzling is disadvantageous inequity aversion, such as being frustrated by being worse off than others. This can lead to heightened competition. It can also lead to spitefulness, such as seeking the misfortunes of those better off. Economic experiments probe these fairness preferences, and some have been adapted for nonhuman primates.

The first study to address this question presented capuchin monkeys with a situation in which one subject is better off than another (Brosnan & de Waal, 2003). The monkeys were trained to exchange a small rock with the experimenter for a food reward. When both monkeys got the same food for their efforts, they consistently completed the exchanges. They also completed exchanges in which one got a less preferred food (cucumber) and the other got a more preferred food (grape). But if one monkey was given the grape without having to make an exchange, while the other had to complete an exchange to get a piece of cucumber, the monkey often refused to complete the exchange. They sometimes threw the rocks at the experimenter or refused to eat the food or tossed it back. Brosnan and de Waal (2003) concluded that capuchin monkeys were sensitive to unfairness, specifically that they were averse to disadvantageous inequity.

Henrich (2004b) pointed out that the monkeys’ refusal to accept cucumbers when their partners received grapes actually increased the inequity. Moreover, he pointed out that the behavior of the capuchins differed in an important way from the behavior of humans in the same situation. The situation that monkeys confronted was similar to what is called the impunity game (Bolton & Zwick, 1995). In this game, one player (the proposer) is given a set of choices between two options. The other player (the responder) can accept or reject the offer. If the offer is rejected, the responder gets nothing, but the responder’s decision has no impact on the other player. In this situation, responders regularly accept unfair offers. This suggests that the capuchins’ refusal to complete trades may not arise from the same types of other-regarding preferences that influence humans’ behavior in the impunity game.

Some researchers have suggested that the capuchins’ behavior may reflect their frustration over seeing more desirable foods that they could not obtain themselves (food expectation: Bräuer, Call, & Tomasello, 2006; Dubreuil, Gentile, & Visalberghi, 2006; Wynne, 2004), frustration at being offered less preferred foods after seeing or having had more preferred foods (frustration effect: Roma, Silberberg, Ruggiero, & Suomi, 2006; Tinklepaugh, 1928), or aversion to losses (Chen, Lakshminarayanan, & Santos, 2006). Inequity aversion has also been examined in chimpanzees (Brosnan, Schiff, & de Waal, 2005), but the results were not strongly supportive: Chimpanzees rarely refused food, and the only exceptions occurred between individuals that had not been housed together for more than a few years. Others have failed to find evidence that chimpanzees or other apes refuse to accept lower-quality food items when conspecifics are provided with higher-quality items (Bräuer et al., 2006, 2009).

These impunity game-type studies have some conceptual difficulties. The subjects interact via an experimenter rather than directly with each other, the advantaged subjects
are not responsible for the unfair outcomes, and the choices the disadvantaged subjects make have no social consequences. A more appropriate test of sensitivity to unfairness is the ultimatum game, which is the most widely used experimental economics test for inequity aversion (Güth, Schmittberger, & Schwarze, 1982). In the standard version of the ultimatum game, one player (the proposer) is given a sum of money that can be divided with another player. The second player (the responder) can accept or reject the offer. Unlike the impunity game, if the responder accepts the offer, both players get the proposed division, but if the responder rejects the offer, both players get nothing. In this situation, a “rational” player would accept any nonzero offer because something is better than nothing; knowing this, proposers should make very low offers. In Western undergraduate student populations—the most studied group of adults—subjects routinely reject offers of less than 50% (Camerer, 2003), and as a result, proposers in these populations tend to make equitable offers. The amounts that are considered fair and the willingness of people to reject unfair offers varies substantially across cultures (Henrich et al., 2006), but fairness sensitivity of some sort is pervasive.

To determine whether chimpanzees are averse to inequity, they were presented with a reduced form of the game called the mini-ultimatum game (Jensen, Call, & Tomasello, 2007b). The mini-ultimatum game, developed by Falk, Fehr, and Fischbacher (2003), was used because it was easier to get proposers to choose between two options than to divide up food rewards, and because the different variations of the game test for unfair intentions as well as unfair outcomes. The proposer is given a set of choices between two options, one of which is always inequitable (8/2), but the extent of unfairness depends on the alternatives. For example, 8/2 is less fair than 5/5, but more fair than 10/0. As in the standard ultimatum game, the responder can accept the proffered distribution, or reject it, causing both to get nothing. In the 8/2 game, the proposer has no choice (8/2 versus 8/2), but some people reject this “offer,” presumably because the proposer is better off, even though he could not have intended this outcome. In this experiment, people were more likely to reject 8/2 offers when the alternative was 5/5, less so when the alternative was generous (2/8), and even less when there was no choice (8/2); some people would even reject 8/2 offers when the alternative was 10/0 (Falk et al., 2003). Chimpanzee proposers could choose between two trays containing raisins arranged according to the different reward distributions, and responders could pull the offered tray within the reach of both of them or reject it by not pulling. The chimpanzees in this study conformed to expectations of rational maximization—responders accepted all nonzero offers regardless of what the proposers got, and proposers chose the largest amounts for themselves (Jensen et al., 2007b). When choices were made by chimpanzees that had effects on their partners, with no human interveners present, there was no evidence for fairness sensitivity.

Although chimpanzees do not seem to take punitive action against unfair distributions, they do respond negatively to violations of expectations that disadvantage themselves (Jensen et al., 2007a). In this experiment, a sliding platform containing several pieces of food was placed in front of the subject. The subject was able to pull a rope that made the platform collapse and the food fall out of reach. In some trials, an experimenter shifted the platform out of the actor’s reach and moved it in front of another empty cage (loss). In other trials, an experimenter shifted the platform out of the actor’s reach and moved it in front of the cage that was now occupied by another group member (unfair), and in
some trials a chimpanzee in the opposite cage was able to pull the platform away from the actor to gain access to the food (theft). Chimpanzees were significantly more likely to collapse the table when their food was taken by a conspecific than when their food was reallocated to another individual by the experimenter or simply taken away. In addition, chimpanzees displayed considerably more evidence of arousal (e.g., piloerection, screams) in the theft condition than in the loss or reallocation conditions. These two studies suggest that the closest living relatives to humans react negatively when others commit transgressions against them (consistent with punishment), but they do not react negatively when resources are divided unequally. Given the mixed results on inequity aversion using impunity game-type tests, advances will come from future work in which individuals produce consequences that affect each other with minimal involvement from human intermediaries.

Other-Regarding Concerns and Moral Sentiments

Other-regarding preferences—whether positive or negative—are motivated by their effect on other individuals. As discussed earlier, other-regarding concerns, or sentiments, are emotions that are sensitive to the emotions and welfare of others (also called fortunes-of-others emotions: Ortony et al., 1988). These can be aligned (symhedonia and empathy) and misaligned (envy and schadenfreude). Aligned concerns can lead to prosocial acts because the actor experiences emotional distress at the suffering of others and positive feelings at the happiness of others. Misaligned concerns can lead to antisocial acts: The happiness of others leads to envy and their sadness is a source of happiness for the actor. Emotions play an important role in moral judgments and actions (Clavien, 2012; de Sousa, 2001; Malti & Ongley; Turiel; Arsenio, this volume), and given the primacy of emotions (Darwin, 1872), these may be present in other species.

Empathy is the prototypical other-regarding concern. It is defined as having the emotions appropriate to the circumstances of another individual (Hoffman, 1982; Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Morris, this volume). It is important to differentiate between emotional contagion and empathy. Emotional contagion can be likened to “catching” the emotions of someone else. Very young infants often cry when they hear others cry, but this does not require any awareness of others’ suffering. Empathy involves some sort of affective perspective taking and can operate in the absence of overt emotional cues (Vaish & Tomasello, this volume). Empathy is important for morality and prosociality because it can motivate acts of altruism (Batson, 1991).

Claims about empathic concern in nonhuman primates are sometimes based on anecdotal reports of one individual helping another or reacting to another animal’s distress (Silk, 2007). For example, Boesch, Bolé, Eckhardt, and Boesch (2010) described the adoption of several orphaned chimpanzees by older, unrelated individuals in the Taï Forest of Côte d’Ivoire, and millions of people have seen the grainy videotape of an adult female gorilla cradling the unconscious body of a young boy who had tumbled into her enclosure. De Waal (2009) argues that apes understand others’ needs and act compassionately based on that understanding. He cites a number of anecdotes to support this argument, including an instance in which a bonobo found a bird in her enclosure, and then carried it up into a tree and “spread its wings as if it were a little airplane, and sent it out into the
air, thus showing a helping action geared to the needs of a bird,” de Waal (2009, p. 91). He also suggests that consolation behavior in chimpanzees, in which bystanders direct affiliative behaviors to victims of aggression, may be motivated by empathy.

Although these reports are intriguing, they present problems of interpretation and unconscious sampling bias. It is possible that adoption and consolation are motivated by empathy and concern for the welfare of others, but this is not the only possible interpretation of these acts. For example, the gorilla that picked up the child that had fallen into her enclosure had previously been trained to cradle a doll in preparation for the birth of her first infant (Silk, 2007). Chimpanzees and bonobos are curious animals—spreading the wings of a bird then releasing it can be an exploration of how these strange creatures fly. Moreover, our anthropomorphic biases may influence what we remember and attend to and color our interpretation of other animals’ behavior (Barrett, 2011).

Again, experiments provide a useful tool for evaluating empathy in other animals. In the 1950s and 1960s a number of studies were designed to determine whether animals exhibit signs of distress when they are exposed to the sight of other animals that are in pain or distress. For ethical reasons, these kinds of studies are no longer being conducted on primates. In one of these vintage experiments, monkeys were trained to associate the presence of another monkey in an adjoining cage with a painful shock to themselves (Miller, Murphy, & Mirsky, 1959; Mirsky, Miller, & Murphy, 1958). They could terminate the shock by pressing a lever. Later, the same monkeys were exposed to the sight (or photographic image) of another monkey being shocked. The monkeys responded to the sight of others being shocked in the same way that they responded when they received shocks themselves. In another set of experiments, macaques were trained to pull one chain in response to a blue light and another chain in response to a red light (Masserman, Wechkin, & Terris, 1964; Wechkin, Masserman, & Terris, Jr., 1964). When the monkeys pulled the right chains in response to the appropriate cues, they were rewarded with food. During these training sessions, another monkey was housed in an adjacent cage. After the monkeys mastered the task, the experimenters rigged the experimental apparatus so that the monkey in the adjacent cage received a shock each time one of the two chains was pulled. The majority of monkeys that Masserman and his colleagues (1964) tested avoided the response that delivered a shock, thereby depriving themselves of the food rewards they would have gotten by pulling the chain. They were especially likely to show this response if they had received shocks themselves in the past. Similar experimental findings come from studies conducted on other species. Mice (Mus musculus) show a more pronounced response to a painful stimulus when another mouse is also seen to be in pain (Langford et al., 2006), and rats (Rattus norwegicus) take action to release a trapped cage mate (Bartal, Decety, & Mason, 2011) or press a lever to lower a distressed rat in a harness (Church, 1959; Rice & Gainer, 1962). Greylag geese (Anser anser) display increased heart rates if they see their mate or close kin (but not other geese) in conflicts (Wascher, Scheiber, & Kotrschal, 2008), and hens (Gallus gallus) respond to aversive stimuli directed at their chicks (Edgar, Nicol, Clark, & Paul, 2012).

However, all of these studies conflate emotional contagion, personal distress, and empathy (Eisenberg, 2002). It may be that chimpanzees lie somewhere between a continuum from emotional contagion and empathy (Koski & Sterck, 2010). Subjects may find certain sights or sounds to be distressing, and they take action to reduce their own distress not because they are concerned about the welfare of the other animal (Parr, 2002). In studies
of empathy in humans, experimenters have taken pains to distinguish between these possibilities by providing subjects with an escape option that allows them to avoid the sight or sound of conspecifics in pain (Batson, 2011). If help is motivated by a genuine desire to help others, rather than a desire to reduce personal distress, subjects will not take advantage of the escape option. On the other hand, if help is motivated by a desire to avoid personal distress, subjects may use the escape option rather than provide help.

Similar procedures need to be implemented in studies of empathy in other animals. It is possible that rats free companions because they value company for themselves, not because they are concerned for the welfare of others, or because they are curious (in some cases, at least, they immediately explore inside the tube that had imprisoned their companion). Ants will also “rescue” other ants that are trapped, but empathy is not attributed to this releasing behavior (Vasconcelos, Hollis, Nowbahari, & Kacelnik, 2012; Nowbahari, Scohier, Durand, & Hollis, 2009). A similar argument could be made about results that show that bonobos willingly open a door to allow another group member to enter their own enclosure and gain access to their food (Hare & Kwetuenda, 2010). In this study, the authors could not rule out the possibility that actors were motivated by their desire for companionship, and the benefit derived by the other individual was an incidental byproduct of their action.

There are, as yet, no studies that directly attempt to measure schadenfreude. The inequity aversion studies described earlier might be motivated out of jealousy, though as discussed, this is a debatable issue. The only studies to directly test for spitefulness in chimpanzees (Jensen et al., 2006, 2007a) did not find any evidence that these apes are motivated to increase the suffering of others. Given that chimpanzees and many other primates are highly competitive, it would be worthwhile to determine whether they have negative other-regarding concerns. Future studies directly testing empathy, schadenfreude, and other other-regarding concerns will contribute to our understanding of their role in human morality.

**Conclusion**

At present, the evidence for anything resembling moral behavior in nonhuman animals is limited. Leaving aside more complicated components of morality, such as reasoning about right and wrong, the emotional substrates of moral behavior are only weakly exhibited. Some observations have been interpreted as prosocial acts that were motivated by empathy and altruism, and other observations have been interpreted as harmful acts that were punitive responses to violations of norms of conduct. However, experimental evidence has produced mixed results. It is certainly too early to conclude that apes lack the kinds of other-regarding concerns that motivate prosocial and punitive acts in humans, but recent studies have challenged views that had previously been based on anecdotal observations. More evidence using carefully controlled experiments that rule out self-regarding preferences and include behavioral, hormonal, and physiological markers of emotions will help resolve this important debate. Human morality evolved, but it is not yet clear when in our history we displayed the first signs of our better nature.
Note

1. The number before the slash represents the payout to Player 1 (e.g., the dictator or proposer), and the number after the slash is the payout for the second player (e.g., the recipient or responder).

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Searching for the Evolutionary Roots of Human Morality


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Part VII

Moral Identity, Community, and the Personal Domain
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Wherein is the motivation to be moral? What instigates, develops, and sustains morally appropriate behavior? This core question has been a recurring conundrum and challenge for the field of moral development, and we seem to have come up short on a satisfactory response. The issue has broad implications: for conceptualization of the breadth and complexity of the moral domain, for the viability of explanatory constructs for moral functioning, and for efforts to implement effective interventions. So the question of moral motivation is a fundamental and pressing concern.

Explanatory notions of moral motivation that dominate the contemporary study of moral development have not been fully adequate to the task. For example, the general notion of self-denying prosociality and empathy (as advanced by Eisenberg, 2005, and Hoffman, 2000, for example) implies that there is no moral value in pursuing personal goals; indeed, self-interest must somehow be suppressed in favor of the interests of others. Similarly, the notion of principled moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981) requires that we universalize our judgments and abstract ourselves from our interests in a situation. And the conceptualization of social understanding advanced by the social domain approach (Nucci, 2001; Turiel, 1998) separates moral obligations from personal and prudential interests.

The empirical problem of these approaches to moral motivation is the recurring evidence of a relatively weak relation between such constructs and moral action (Blasi, 1980; Krebs & Denton, 2005; Walker, 2004). The conceptual problem of these approaches, argued by Campbell and Christopher (1996) as well, is that they require one to act from obligation and against one’s personal inclinations, which essentially eliminates the motivation to be moral. The fundamental flaw is their contention that morality should not be self-regarding. These approaches reflect the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment Era with its dualistic conception of human nature that pitted reason against passion and with its narrow (formalist) definition of morality that excluded a broader consideration of the self or personality (with which a eudaimonic, Aristotelian perspective might be more compatible). The moral agent is left disembodied and enervated by these models.

Flanagan’s (1991, 2009) philosophical analysis is discerning in this regard. He advances twin arguments: The first is that personal interests, projects, and commitments impart
meaning to life, and that such meaning is integral to morality; and the second is that any moral conception, to be viable, must explain the motivational functioning for its realization. This motivational functioning must be psychologically feasible “for creatures like us”—what Flanagan labels the “principle of minimal psychological realism” (p. 32). These arguments suggest that we need to provide “thicker” accounts of moral functioning than those extant if we are to more adequately explain moral motivation and consequent moral action.

The maneuver explored in this chapter is individuals’ developing appropriation of morality as core to their identity and personality. Such an approach has received increasing conceptual and empirical interest, especially within the last decade or so, and such work will be the focus of our attention here. It is important to emphasize that we should not jettison the significant role of moral cognition in moral functioning (because of its importance in defining the moral quality of situations and in informing moral action), so concepts of the moral self and personality should be understood as mediating variables in this broader enterprise.

In this chapter I organize the theoretical and empirical manifestations of this attention to moral identity and personality, as explanations for moral motivation, into three overarching approaches: (a) trait-based accounts, (b) sociocognitive accounts, and (c) personological accounts. As will become evident, most research in this area to date has focused on manifestations of mature moral motivation (in adulthood), attempting to define the endpoint of moral identity and personality. This would seem to be the beginning step in an enterprise of “reverse engineering”—first finding evidence for a viable construct of moral motivation and only then deconstructing it to explore developmental roots, trajectories, and processes in childhood and adolescence.

Trait-based accounts represent the “having” side of personality description and so align with the dispositional perspective that assumes cross-situational consistency and temporal stability in behavioral dispositions. Thus, work in this area focuses on the developing appropriation of moral traits in moral identity.

Sociocognitive accounts more represent the “doing” side of personality description and so more align with a situational perspective that recognizes the role of contextual factors in both moral identity and behavior. Work in this area focuses on the cognitive and affective mechanisms in how people construe the social context and respond to it, including the activation (and deactivation) of aspects of moral identity.

Personological accounts contend that to fully understand moral motivation, the field needs to go beyond dispositionally based and situationally influenced moral traits to include broader aspects of personality that are also relevant to moral functioning. Work here typically focuses on the aspects of personality description that deal with goal motivation and life narratives, often as evidenced in the psychological functioning of moral exemplars.

Before I provide an exploration and evaluation of these three (somewhat competing) accounts of moral motivation, I review Blasi’s moral self model—as setting the stage for contemporary theorizing and empirical research. Blasi’s model is not particularly partial to any of the three overarching accounts, but certainly is informative for each in some way or another.

**Foundations: The Moral Self Model**

Blasi (1983, 1984; also see Damon, 1984, for additional insights) can largely be credited with introducing notions of moral self and identity to the field at a time when cognitive
aspects of moral development were the center of considerable conceptual and empirical attention. His moral self model posits the self as the central explanatory concept of moral development, with three constructs, in particular, being primary in understanding individuals’ organization of self-relevant information.

First, Blasi argued for the centrality of morality for one’s sense of self (moral self-identity). In contrast to Erikson’s (1968) view, Blasi held that identity could be constructed around issues other than occupational choice and political orientation; in particular, identity could also be framed by moral concerns, the extent to which would help inform moral motivation. In other words, the centrality of morality in identity can be construed as an individual difference variable. As we shall see, it is this aspect of Blasi’s self model that has sparked the most empirical attention.

Second, Blasi emphasized the motivational dynamism of psychological self-consistency. As with theories in many domains of psychology, Blasi’s model holds that individuals tend toward internal self-organization and coherence. Thus, moral agents are motivated to reduce inconsistency among various cognitions and also between thought and action, at least in their awareness. And, as Bandura (2002) has illustrated, often-unconscious processes of moral disengagement (such as cognitive reconstruals and deflection of responsibility) function corruptively to bolster this sense of moral self-consistency.

Third, Blasi’s self model includes judgments of personal responsibility; such judgments implicate the self in action. In other words, it is not sufficient to merely decide what is morally good in a situation; a judgment also has to be made regarding the extent to which what is morally good is also strictly required for the self. This judgment of personal responsibility extends moral self-identity to concrete action.

Blasi (1993) helpfully summarized the essence of his model as follows:

Moral understanding more reliably gives rise to moral action if it is translated into a judgment of personal responsibility; moral responsibility is the result of integrating morality in one’s identity or sense of self; from moral identity derives a psychological need to make one’s actions consistent with one’s ideals. (p. 99)

Note that Blasi (2004) retained in his model a role for the motivational power of moral knowledge and reason, and he argued that someone who knows moral norms but who does not regard them as requiring adherence for their own sake does not really understand morality. In this sense, Blasi gave attention to both the content of identity (i.e., specific moral values and ideals) and to the subjective experience of identity.

Blasi (2005) provided further theoretical elaboration of his model with a somewhat more characterological twist in specifying various virtues that are critical for the functioning of a moral self-identity. For example, willpower (the capacity for self-control and self-regulation) helps to facilitate moral concerns by putting them into action. But note that willpower is morally neutral in that it can just as well serve nefarious as worthy ends. A second virtue that Blasi posits is integrity of identity, which entails concern for the unity of the self and ensures that behaviors are consistent with one’s moral identity. Again, this virtue is morally neutral because its moral significance depends on the particular values and commitments that one’s identity may entail. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Blasi contends that moral desires form the essence of moral character, a term
that embodies much greater valence than does “motivation.” Blasi intends this notion to imply an intensity of affect that connects with the concept of will. In this view, the virtues of willpower and integrity derive their moral meaning and significance from these moral desires.

Summary

Several obvious strengths of Blasi’s model can be noted. Of course, its emphasis on aspects of the self helps to expand the moral domain from a cognitive focus to one that better reflects insights from personality and social psychology—this has had substantial heuristic value for the field. The model does, however, retain moral understanding at its starting point and core. Its conception of morality is strongly agentic—to wit, judgments of personal responsibility, willpower, moral desires, and so on. And, finally, rather than emphasizing moral capacities, his model references potential individual differences in moral centrality and moral desires.

Despite the advances provided by the model, there are some important limitations to consider. First, in Blasi’s conceptualization, identity does not emerge until adolescence or early adulthood, leaving the earlier part of the lifespan unaccounted for from a perspective of moral motivation (in the face of evolving evidence of young children’s moral capabilities; Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007; Wright & Bartsch, 2008). Nascent signs of moral motivation have been detected in toddlers’ adverse reactions to flawed objects and early expressions of self-referential emotions such as guilt and shame (Thompson, 2009). For example, Kochanska, Casey, and Fukumoto (1995) found that toddlers’ reactivity to the flawed quality of objects was associated with their responses to their own apparent wrongdoing, reflecting an emerging sensitivity to how things ought to be and the motivation to make things right.

Although Blasi (1993) acknowledged that moral responsibility and genuine morality are clearly evident in childhood, his self model does not speak to moral motivation in that developmental period. The model describes the moral identity of the mature individual (for whom moral identity is central to the self) but does not describe developmental processes in its acquisition nor the functioning of those individuals for whom morality is not a central concern. Explicit moral understandings and judgments (following Kohlberg, 1981, among others) form the starting point of the model, but implicit moral cognitions receive no credence when accumulating evidence indicates the significant influence of intuitive judgments in moral functioning (Haidt, 2001; Lapsley & Hill, 2008).

Perhaps the major limitation of the model, however, is that despite the sizable conceptual head on its shoulders, its empirical legs are noticeably lacking. Blasi failed to provide an empirical paradigm by which his model could be tested. Without operationalizations of these somewhat nebulous constructs and without explicit empirical predictions, the approach began to languish. Fortunately, other scholars, intrigued by the promise of moral motivation inherent in the moral self model, began to undertake the empirical research that could move the enterprise forward. The approaches they took, however, were not uniform; some focused on the possession of moral traits, and others focused on sociocognitive mechanisms that are more contextually sensitive, whereas still others attended not
to traits but to broader aspects of personality. I now turn to a critical examination of work within each of these three overarching approaches.

**Theoretical Background and Empirical Research**

**Trait-Based Accounts**

Trait-based accounts of moral identity and moral motivation reflect the dominant dispositional perspective in personality. These contend that behavioral dispositions are well captured by traits. In other words, the possession of various morally relevant traits in one’s identity should be predictive of moral functioning. It is assumed by these accounts that it makes sense to reference the possession of traits in that they should be evidenced somewhat consistently across contexts and be stable over time.

**Naturalistic Conceptions of Moral Traits**

So what are these morally relevant traits that should be embodied in a moral identity? The first step in addressing this question is to explore notions of moral functioning embedded in common understandings. Such notions can help to correct conceptual skews in definitions of morality, and they are also revelatory of what is operative in everyday psychological functioning. Once traits in a mature moral identity have been identified, researchers will be able to work backward to examine nascent forms of a moral identity and the processes that facilitate or constrain its development.

Walker and Pitts (1998) tapped people’s implicit notions regarding moral functioning and thereby derived a taxonomic description of moral character traits. Such a taxonomy is suggestive of which moral traits should be endemic to moral identity. In a series of studies, samples of adults (17–94 years of age) were prompted to generate moral traits, rate the prototypicality of these traits for a highly moral person, and to organize these traits into coherent groups. Analyses of these data indicated six distinct clusters of moral traits in individuals’ naturalistic conceptions, reflecting themes of: principles/ideals, dependability/loyalty, integrity, care/trustworthiness, fairness, and confidence. Whereas some of these moral traits are familiar in many theories of moral development, others have received minimal attention but are obviously relevant to people’s ordinary understandings of morality.

In a later study, Walker (1999) analyzed these moral traits in terms of the five-factor model of personality and found that terms reflecting traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness were particularly salient, confirming those factors as distinctive dimensions of moral character. Walker and Pitts (1998) also derived the dimensions underlying people’s conceptions of morality: A self/other dimension was primary and reflects the tension between agentic and communal aspects of moral functioning, whereas the secondary external/internal dimension reflects the relevance of both external norms and internal aspects of conscience in understandings of morality. Interestingly, in a subsequent study examining naturalistic conceptions of moral traits associated with different types of moral functioning (just, brave, and caring), also conducted with adults (17–92 years of age), Walker and Hennig (2004) found that, across these disparate types, all shared the tension
between traits of personal agency and traits of an interpersonal nature. These findings across studies implicate the significance of the fundamental motivational duality of agency and communion, a theme to which I shall return in a later section of this chapter.

One of the limitations of Walker’s (1999; Walker & Hennig, 2004; Walker & Pitts, 1998) studies of moral-trait conceptions is that they were conducted only with adults and did not assess developmental patterns. This limitation was addressed in a study by Hardy, Walker, Olsen, Skalski, and Basinger (2011) who examined adolescents’ conceptions of moral functioning using similar free-listing, prototypicality-rating, and similarity-sorting procedures. Interestingly, the same two dimensions (self/other and external/internal) organized adolescents’ understandings as found by Walker and Pitts (1998); similar clusters emerged as well. In addition, developmental trends were found in adolescents’ moral-trait conceptions: Older adolescents (15–18 years of age) generated more moral traits in the free-listing task than did younger adolescents (10–14 years of age), indicating greater accessibility of the construct; older adolescents evidenced a stronger association between the accessibility and the importance of these traits (free-listing and prototypicality-rating, respectively) than younger adolescents, indicating more coherent understandings; and older adolescents evidenced a greater number of clusters in their organization of these traits than did younger adolescents, indicating greater differentiation. Obviously, the next step in this line of research would be to examine moral-trait conceptions in childhood. Given the evidence of developmental patterns in children’s self-understanding and interpersonal awareness (Damon & Hart, 1988; Selman, 1980), it could be anticipated that younger children would have more concrete, and less nuanced and differentiated conceptions of moral functioning.

The research reviewed to this point has served to provide a heuristic taxonomy of moral traits in adolescents’ and adults’ common understandings, but the existence of these moral-trait conceptions begs the question of their predictive validity: Are these naturalistic conceptions of moral traits associated with actual moral behavior? The first suggestion of an affirmative answer was provided by Hart and Fegley’s (1995) study of adolescent moral exemplars (mean age = 16 years) who exhibited extraordinary levels of care, along with a matched comparison group. Among other measures, they were prompted to provide a free description of the self. The self-descriptions of the moral exemplars were found to include more references to moral personality traits and goals than among comparison adolescents, suggesting that moral-trait self-attributions may be importantly linked to moral action. It remains to be determined whether the same pattern would be evidenced among children.

**Trait Measures of Moral Identity**

Moral identity has not yet figured in our discussion of trait-based accounts; the focus so far has been limited to mere conceptions of moral traits. Reimer, DeWitt Goudelock, and Walker (2009) developed a measure of moral identity derived from the moral traits generated in Walker and Pitts’s (1998) earlier study. They adapted these moral traits into a 44-item self-attribution scale that was administered to a large sample of high school students (11–19 years of age). Factor analysis yielded five factors, largely replicating the clusters reported by Walker and Pitts, again confirming these as themes in moral functioning. Further, Reimer et al. assessed the predictive validity of their scale and found that
the caring–dependable and principled–idealistic moral-trait self-attribution factors were significantly associated with volunteer activity and service motivation.

One of the methodological features of Reimer et al.’s (2009) moral identity scale is its reliance on moral-trait terms generated by adults in Walker and Pitts’s (1998) study. Such trait terms may not adequately represent what is most salient and appropriate for adolescents. Hardy, Walker, Gray, Ruchty, and Olsen (2012) derived a somewhat different measure, which was intended to tap the moral ideal self. Rather than self-attributions for the actual self, this measure focuses on the kind of person one wants to be, which would seem to tap an important aspect of moral identity. The moral ideal self can guide behavior by identifying terminal values, providing goals, and triggering accompanying affect (e.g., a disparity between the actual and the ideal self should elicit negative emotion reflecting the functioning of the self-consistency motive).

In Hardy et al.’s (2012) study, the moral-trait terms were generated by 10- to 18-year-old adolescents themselves (in a sequence of free-listing and prototypicality-rating procedures), followed by the rating of these prototypic moral traits for the ideal self. Subsequent factor analysis yielded a 20-item self-report scale. So the issue then arises as to whether such a moral ideal-self measure has any predictive validity. Even after accounting for other aspects of moral identity (viz., Aquino & Reed’s [2002] moral identity measure), Hardy et al. found that the moral ideal self positively predicted parent-reported adolescent altruism and moral traits, and negatively predicted parent-reported adolescent aggression and adolescent-reported cheating behavior. These findings are notable in a couple of respects: One is that the findings are evident not only with self-reported moral behavior but also with parent-reported behavior; the other is that the moral ideal-self measure remains predictive even after controlling for a somewhat “competing” and well-validated measure of moral identity. It would appear that a trait-based account of the moral ideal self has considerable promise as a measure of moral identity.

Summary

The research reviewed here on trait-based accounts has identified the moral traits characteristic of a moral identity in adolescence and adulthood and has indicated that the self-appropriation of these traits is predictive of relevant moral behaviors. Research has yet to explore, however, the acquisition and significance of moral traits in childhood, but there is evidence of developmental patterns with older individuals showing more accessible, differentiated, and coherent understandings, reflective of growth in both cognitive processing and relational experiences.

This research paradigm implicitly assumes, however, that these moral traits denote behavioral dispositions that cohere within the individual (as evidenced by moral, or immoral, character) and that are consistently evidenced across situations and are relatively stable over time (Epstein, 1979).

However, the evolving consensus in personality research is that the empirical evidence for consistency of trait-based behavior within individuals and across contexts is not compelling; indeed, the current lack of such evidence in the moral domain is quite notable (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006). Hardy and Carlo (2005, 2011) make the distinction between a moral identity that is trait-based versus state-based; that is, one that is stable versus
contextually activated. Part of the conceptual problem here is the assumption that moral traits, to be meaningful, ought to be consistently enacted across situations. But as Flanagan (2009) notes, reflecting classic Aristotelian wisdom, “[A] virtue is a disposition {to perceive, to feel, to think, to judge, to act} in a way that is appropriate to the situation” (p. 58). The exercise of moral traits should entail contextual specificity. Sociocognitive accounts of moral identity are more adept in that regard, and it is to such accounts that I now turn.

Sociocognitive Accounts

If trait-based accounts of moral identity exemplify the “having” side of personality, then sociocognitive accounts better represent the “doing” side, given their emphasis on the role of contextual influences and cognitive–affective mechanisms in how people construe and respond to these influences. These sociocognitive accounts regard moral identity as a social phenomenon that is malleable by situational factors that function to activate various aspects of moral identity, including the particular content of identity and the centrality of moral concerns to that identity.

Content of Moral Identity

Thus, one individual difference variable concerns the content of the moral schemas that are functional in individuals’ information processing. Haidt and Graham’s (2007; also see Graham et al., 2011) moral foundations theory is relevant in this regard, although it does not yet have a developmental framing. The theory holds that people vary in the extent to which they rely on different foundations (or intuitive systems) in their moral functioning. Their evidence is that liberals prioritize the individualizing foundations of concern for care and fairness, whereas conservatives also incorporate the binding foundations of in-group loyalty, authority, and purity. Our interest here is not an examination of these different foundations but rather to simply make the point that the content of moral identity may differ considerably across individuals. Given that these foundations are conceptualized as intuitive systems (consistent with aspects of Haidt’s [2001] social intuitionist model), it allows for the possibility that some of the functioning of people’s moral identities may be implicit and automatic. Whether such intuitive functioning arises at the front end of development as reflective of affective, evolutionally based processes or at the back end of development as a result of increasing expertise remains unresolved (Walker & Frimer, 2011). Also unaddressed are developmental patterns in reliance on these moral foundations in decision making.

Moral Centrality

Not only can the content of moral identity vary across individuals, but its accessibility can also vary. Lapsley and Narvaez (2004, 2006) introduced the notion of moral chronicity, which references the extent to which one encodes the world in moral terms and the extent to which moral traits are central and important to one’s self-understanding (reminiscent of Blasi’s [1983] concept of moral centrality). Thus, for Lapsley and Narvaez, people with a well-developed moral identity have moral schemas that are both typically
accessible and easily primed. Developmental trajectories in the accessibility of moral schemas remain to be examined, but increasing sensitivity with age to the moral implications of one’s actions for self and others would be predicted (Frimer & Walker, 2011).

In Lapsley and Narvaez’s view, moral identity is conceptualized as having both dispositional aspects (chronic accessibility of moral traits) and situational aspects (susceptibility to priming). Lapsley and Hill (2009) contend that behavioral consistency and situational specificity are not necessarily incompatible positions, an issue to which we shall return in a later section of the chapter.

Narvaez, Lapsley, Hagele, and Lasky (2006) examined claims regarding the construct of moral chronicity using a spontaneous trait-inference paradigm. Participants (18- to 22-year-old undergraduates) were first prompted to record the personality traits of various individuals (a primacy-of-output task). If participants frequently generated moral traits in their descriptions, then they were classified as moral chronics; if moral traits were infrequent, then they were classified as nonchronics. Next, Narvaez et al. assessed whether participants would make trait inferences that were congruent with their more accessible schemas (in other words, reflecting their information processing). Participants read some stimulus material, and then were provided with dispositional and semantic cues and asked to recall the material. As predicted, people made inferences that were consistent with the schemas that were most accessible to them: In a spontaneous-processing condition, moral chronics had better recall when prompted with dispositional cues (reflecting the relative accessibility of moral traits in their information processing), whereas nonchronics had better recall when prompted by semantic cues. This study provides beginning evidence of the role of contextual factors, interacting with dispositional ones, in the functioning of moral identity.

Aquino and Reed (2002) developed what has become the most widely used measure of moral identity, one that taps the centrality or self-importance in moral identity of moral traits. Respondents are first presented with a set of nine trait terms that are often considered to be characteristic of a moral person (caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, helpful, hardworking, honest, and kind) and then asked to rate, on a 10-item scale, to what extent they identify with those characteristics. Sample statements on the 10-item scale include “It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics” and “I am actively involved in activities that communicate to others that I have these characteristics.” The measure taps both the private and public aspects of moral identity with two subscales: The internalization subscale reflects the personal importance of possessing these moral traits, whereas the symbolization subscale reflects the importance of communicating one’s morality to others.

Thus, the centrality of moral identity refers to the self-perceived importance of moral traits. There is evolving evidence for the predictive validity of this brief measure of moral identity. Aquino and Reed (2002) reported that moral identity predicted spontaneously generated moral themes in self-concepts in a sample of high school students (mean age = 17 years) and predicted self-reported volunteerism in a sample of adults (mean age = 42 years), and that the internalization subscale predicted actual food-drive donations among high school students (mean age = 17 years). Reed and Aquino (2003) examined the relationship between moral identity and reactions to out-groups in the context of intergroup conflict, predicting that the self-importance of moral identity should be associated with
lower levels of out-group hostility, reflecting moral universal values (an expanded perspective of moral concern). They found, with various samples of university students, that the internalization subscale (only) predicted self-reported moral obligations toward out-groups, perceived worthiness of humanitarian aid to members of out-groups, donation of money to humanitarian aid to an out-group, and a lessened willingness to accept civilian deaths as a result of a retaliatory military attack against an out-group. Note the consistent evidence that the internalization subscale is a better predictor of attitudes and behaviors than the symbolization subscale, which seems to focus more on impression management.

Moral Salience

An important distinction can be made between the self-importance (or centrality) of moral identity and its salience. The former is more reflective of a trait-based or dispositional perspective on moral identity, whereas the latter is more consistent with a situational account in that it refers to the temporary activation of moral identity by contextual factors. Moral centrality was the focus of Aquino and Reed’s earlier work; more recently their focus has been on the construct of moral salience. Typically, they manipulate the salience of moral identity by some priming paradigm, such as having participants write a story using moral trait terms or doing a crossword search for moral terms, thereby sensitizing them to the moral domain.

For example, Reed, Aquino, and Levy (2007) found that priming the salience of moral identity increased participants’ (university students, administrative staff, and community members) professed willingness to donate time to a charitable organization (relative to a marketing association), in comparison to neutral (nonmoral) priming. In another test of the situational influence of moral identity priming, Aquino, Reed, Thau, and Freeman (2007) examined its impact on the functioning of moral disengagement strategies (which serve to maintain a positive self-image while engaging in immoral acts; Bandura, 2002). Adult participants (university students, administrative staff, and community members) were assigned to either a moral identity–priming or a neutral–priming condition. After aspects of their identity were primed, they completed a moral disengagement measure and provided self-ratings on their emotional reactions to abuse. In the neutral–priming condition, moral disengagement was negatively related to negative emotional reactions to abuse, whereas in the moral identity–priming condition, there was no relationship between moral disengagement strategies and negative emotions, suggesting that making moral identity more salient functioned to mitigate the operation of moral disengagement strategies.

In a third study of situational influences on the salience of moral identity, Aquino, McFerran, and Laven (2011) manipulated two situational factors: the salience of moral identity (moral priming versus neutral priming) and exposure to a moral story (regarding an act of uncommon moral goodness versus a merely positive story). Participants’ (university students) subsequent prosocial behavior was assessed by a modified dictator game. They found that enhanced prosocial behavior was only evidenced when both participants’ moral identity had been made salient and they had been exposed to an act of moral goodness. These three studies demonstrate the role of situational influences on moral identity, but also that their effects may be relatively subtle.
More recently, Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, and Felps (2009, Study 4) examined the joint influence of dispositional factors (the centrality of moral identity) and situational factors (the priming of moral identity) on moral behavior in a sample of undergraduate business students (mean age = 20 years). First, they assessed moral centrality using their measure of moral identity, and then they manipulated the salience of moral identity (with either a moral prime or a neutral prime). In a lab session, participants were engaged in a virtual task involving investment decisions in which rational individual interests were in conflict with the collective good. They found that sustained cooperative behavior over time in the context of self-interested behavior by others was only evidenced in the moral priming condition for those who had a highly central moral identity, indicating the joint influence of situational and dispositional factors. As Narvaez and Lapsley (2009) noted, “That the work of moral identity interacts with situational variables is not itself a theoretical embarrassment of any kind” (p. 443). If moral identity could not be influenced by situational factors, it would suggest that its development would be impervious to socialization influences. This argument, of course, reinforces the call for research on moral identity with younger child and adolescent participants for whom moral concerns may be less central to the self and for whom situational factors may operate quite differently.

Monin and Jordan (2009) also have a productive line of research that focuses on the situational malleability of moral identity. They construe moral identity as moral self-regard, an important component of a dynamic self-concept that is constantly varying as a function of situational influences—influences that can be readily manipulated. Evidence supporting this perspective has taken several tracks. For example, Monin and Miller (2001) found that bolstering undergraduate students’ moral credentials (making them feel secure about their moral standing) can license them to behave less morally in the future (reminiscent of Nisan’s [1991] balance model). Similarly, Jordan and Monin (2008) found that when undergraduates are made to experience failures in other domains, they engage in moral compensation by bolstering their own moral self-regard. Finally, Monin, Sawyer, and Marquez (2008) threatened undergraduate students’ moral identity by exposing them to the exemplary behavior of others and found that they evidenced moral resentment, coming to dislike those with whom they had been implicitly compared. Thus, the social context can have a considerable impact on moral identity and its functioning.

Summary

The research on sociocognitive accounts reviewed here builds on trait-based accounts of moral identity to demonstrate that people actively construe the social context according to various cognitive–affective mechanisms and that the salience of their moral identity—and its consequent impact on moral attitudes and behavior—can be readily influenced by a variety of situational factors that serve to activate or suppress its functioning. The trait-based versus social–cognitive accounts have different emphases in their understanding of moral identity—character versus context—but are not fundamentally incompatible. Most researchers in the trait-based paradigm would readily accede to the view that moral traits are and should be situationally sensitive, and most researchers in the social–cognitive paradigm would acknowledge that moral identity is also an individual difference variable that entails at least a modicum of intrapersonal consistency across contexts and over time. And,
as has been frequently noted here, developmental patterns and processes in the acquisition of a moral identity remain relatively unexamined.

The major limitation of both the trait-based and sociocognitive accounts is that they are heavily reliant on a single level of personality description—behavioral traits—and have relatively little to say about moral motivation. Although traits have considerable moral implications, especially the big-five factors of agreeableness and conscientiousness, and perhaps also openness to experience (McAdams, 2009; Walker, 1999), description is at a somewhat broad, nonspecific, and superficial level. To more adequately understand moral motivation, the field needs to go beyond dispositionally based and situationally influenced traits to include other aspects of personality that are relevant to moral functioning and, in particular, to examine how morality gets appropriated into these aspects of personality. It is to those personological accounts of moral identity and motivation that I now turn.

**Personological Accounts**

**Levels of Personality Description**

From a personological perspective, McAdams (1995, 2009) has most helpfully outlined a threefold typology of personality description that references the various aspects that must be understood if we are to really know a person. The first level is that of dispositional traits—broad, nonconditional, decontextualized, and implicitly comparative dimensions. Such traits were our focus in the first sections of this chapter. The second level entails characteristic adaptations—the motivational and strategic aspects of personality that are contextualized in time, place, and/or role. These adaptive strategies may better capture individuals’ moral motivation than do generic traits. The third level refers to integrative life narratives—the psychosocial construction of an identity that provides a sense of coherence, meaning, and purpose in life. In such accounts of their lives, people, either implicitly or explicitly, take a moral stance regarding the self and society and, thus, to varying extents, construct their identity in moral terms.

As beginning evidence for the potential of going beyond dispositional traits in tapping moral motivation, Walker and Frimer (2007) undertook a broadband assessment of personality (tapping all three levels with multiple measures) for a sample of adult moral exemplars (national award recipients for extraordinary brave or caring action) as well as matched comparison participants. In support of the proposal to consider broader aspects of personality, it was found that, while moral exemplars and comparisons were not distinguished in terms of dispositional traits, they were clearly so at the other levels of personality description.

**Personality of Moral Exemplars**

Studies of moral personality have frequently involved moral exemplars, and for good reason: Processes of moral functioning can be more easily identified with “extreme” groups; different types or ideals of moral excellence can be more meaningfully examined; and more holistic, person-level analyses can be conducted which can provide greater insights regarding the complexities and interrelationships integral to moral functioning (Walker, 2002).
The landmark study here was conducted by Colby and Damon (1992) who, first, had a diverse panel of ethical experts derive a set of criteria for moral exemplarity and nominate people who fit these criteria. Then, Colby and Damon did a case-study analysis of a small sample of these nominated exemplars (all of whom were adults). Their qualitative analyses identified four processes in moral personality development: (a) a continuing capacity for change; (b) certainty about moral values and principles, balanced by open-mindedness and truth seeking; (c) positivity, humility, love, and an underlying faith; and (d) an identity that fused the personal and moral aspects of their lives. It is this last process—the appropriation of morality into one’s identity such that personal fulfillment comes from pursuing moral concerns—that best exemplifies the psychological maneuver that is the focus of this chapter.

Some other notable qualitative research has been reported with other exemplar groups: Holocaust rescuers, Carnegie and military heroes, philanthropists, and so on (Monroe, 2002; Oliner, 2003; Oliner & Oliner, 1988), but such research is limited by the lack of objective methodology and comparison groups, making inferences tenuous. However, there are now several studies of moral exemplars using quantitative methodology.

Hart and Fegley (1995) identified a sample of adolescents (mean age = 16 years) who, despite living in disadvantaged circumstances, engaged in extraordinary levels of care for others. Among other things, this study established that moral exemplarity is not restricted to adulthood and can be meaningfully detected earlier in the lifespan. These adolescent care exemplars were contrasted with a matched group of comparison adolescents on various measures of self-concept and self-understanding. Their findings revealed that adolescent care exemplars more readily incorporated their ideal selves into their actual selves than did comparisons, evidenced a greater number of moral themes in their goal motivation, and showed more continuity in their self-understanding—all indicative of the pervasive incorporation of morality in their identity.

McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield (1997) conducted an extensive life-story interview with a sample of generative schoolteachers and community volunteers (ranging in age from 25 to 72 years), along with a similar comparison group of participants, and examined these life narratives for various psychological themes. They found that these generative adults expressed more redemption sequences in their life stories than did comparison participants; that is, they tended to construe negative life events as having some positive outcome or benefit. This tendency to redeem critical life events represents a particularly adaptive coping strategy (McAdams, 2006). The generative adults also expressed more prosocial goals for the future and had indications of “early advantage” in recollections of childhood, specifically a sense of family blessing and some meaningful exposure to the suffering of others. Such early life experiences are suggestive of some of the aspects of socialization that may be formative in an emerging moral personality and that could profitably be directly tapped in childhood and adolescence.

The moral personality of non-Jewish Holocaust rescuers, in comparison to bystanders from the same communities, was examined by Midlarsky, Jones, and Corley (2005; Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007). In this research, self-report measures of personality were administered several decades subsequent to the Holocaust (mean age of the sample was 72 years), begging the causal question of whether these personality dispositions were present at the time of moral action or developed as a consequence. Their analyses indicated a couple
of major themes in the retrospective accounts of rescuers (in contrast to the comparison bystanders): One was a propensity for risk taking; the other was rescuers’ accentuated altruistic motivation (altruistic moral values, social responsibility, and empathic concern for others). These two themes are suggestive of the coactivation of agentic and communal motivation, respectively.

Broadband Assessment of the Moral Personality

The first study to undertake a broadband assessment of the personality (viz., traits, adaptations, and narratives) of moral exemplars was conducted with young adults who had been identified for their extraordinary involvement with social service agencies, along with a group of matched comparison participants (Matsuba & Walker, 2004, 2005). These young adult exemplars (18–30 years of age) were found to be distinguished from comparisons in their moral personality on several variables, including stronger traits of agreeableness, advanced ego–identity status, greater ideological depth, more developed epistemic and moral reasoning, more prosocial goals for the future, greater childhood awareness of others’ suffering, and more themes of agency in their life stories. The range of these differences is indicative of the pervasive moral personality of exemplars, but this research was conducted with young adults who were just embarking upon a “moral career.” Research with children who consistently engage in exceptional moral action could reveal some of the personological roots and socialization influences that are preparatory to a moral lifestyle. On the other hand, perhaps by examining more mature exemplars, a clearer picture of the fully formed moral personality and motivation may emerge.

Such has been our more recent program of exemplar research (Walker & Frimer, 2007, 2009). This research, assessing personality comprehensively at all three levels of McAdams’s (1995) typology, was conducted with Canadian national award recipients for extra-ordinary moral action: Some had received the Medal of Bravery for risking their lives to save another, whereas others had received the Caring Canadian Award for years of volunteer service to groups, communities, or humanitarian causes. The sample was composed of adults, but there was considerable variability in age (23–91 years). Also recruited for participation was a group of individually matched comparison adults. Note that this study entailed two, quite different, types of moral exemplars: brave and caring. Such a design allows for an exploration of the possibility of different moral ideals and accompanying moral personalities, as well as the aspects of personality that are common to these disparate types, suggestive of the core of moral functioning.

Different Moral Personality Profiles

The first issue examined by Walker and Frimer (2007) concerned whether these brave and caring exemplars evidence different personality profiles, which, as the data revealed, they did. But, interestingly, the differences in personality profiles consistently favored the caring over the brave exemplars (e.g., with caring exemplars having stronger traits of nurturance, evidencing more generative personal strivings, and displaying greater optimism throughout their life stories). In other words, the personality of the caring award recipients was more adaptive and more transparent, perhaps indicative of their longstanding moral
commitments and action in contrast to the single act of heroism committed by the bravery award recipients. This pattern of findings suggests that the moral actions of the caring exemplars might be attributable to character and motivational factors, whereas the moral actions of the brave exemplars are better attributable to situational factors. Our discussion shall return shortly to the issue of dispositional versus situational influences on moral behavior.

Foundational Core

The second issue examined by Walker and Frimer (2007) concerned the foundational core—the “psychological essentia”—of moral personality. Here the analyses focused on the personality characteristics shared by brave and caring exemplars that also distinguished them from the comparison participants. The same pattern of personality exemplarity was evidenced for five variables: themes of agency and communion in life narratives, redemption sequences (the positive construal of life events and the meaning derived from them), and formative relationships in childhood as evidenced by secure attachments and the presence of “helpers” who fostered development.

These aspects of the moral personality, common to these quite disparate types of exemplarity, indicate the centrality of these variables in mature moral functioning and its development. The significance of beneficial relationships in childhood is suggestive of the socialization roots of mature moral motivation (Dunn, 2006; Thompson, 2009). That both brave and caring exemplars evidenced pronounced levels of both agency and communion—the fundamental duality of human existence (Bakan, 1966)—may well be informative of the moral motivation that underlies exemplary action. Our discussion will return to this notion after we explore the issue of the dispositional versus situational influences on moral behavior.

Dispositions Versus Situations

One of the central assumptions underlying much of the research reviewed in this chapter is that moral character (moral traits, personality, and identity) is causally operative in instigating moral action. However, within social psychology, a contrary perspective contends that situational forces are the primary process driving moral behavior (Doris, 2002; Zimbardo, 2007). In this perspective, contextual factors function to cause action and, then, in a post hoc fashion, individuals may script their personality to reflect their behavior. The dispositional perspective, in contrast, holds that personological factors are primary in motivating and producing action. Thus, the situational perspective should be understood as a blunt challenge to the framing of this chapter and so warrants some consideration.

The viability of the construct of the causal moral personality was the focus of Walker, Frimer, and Dunlop’s (2010) analysis of Canadian award recipients for extraordinary moral action. They conducted a cluster analysis of these moral exemplars, based on a large set of personality variables, and then compared the resultant clusters with matched comparison participants. Although scholars within the dispositional perspective all hold to the viability of the construct of moral personality, they make somewhat different predictions about its form: For example, Aristotle’s (trans. 1962) notion of the unity-of-the-virtues implies a
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functional interdependence among aspects of personality such that one cluster of exemplars should emerge with its cases being exemplary on all variables. Kohlberg’s (1981) notion of the single moral ideal of principles of justice also implies one cluster but characterized by the single variable of moral reasoning. Finally, Flanagan’s (1991) notion of different varieties of moral personality suggests that multiple clusters will emerge, each distinctive in its composition. On the other hand, scholars advancing the situational perspective make the straightforward prediction that exemplars will not meaningfully differ from comparisons in personality functioning (since it is situational factors that are causally operative).

Walker et al.’s (2010) analysis revealed three clusters of moral exemplars: (a) a communal cluster (characterized by themes of communion in life stories, goal motivation focused on relational and generativity strivings, and traits of nurturance); (b) a deliberative cluster (characterized by advanced epistemic and moral reasoning, self-development strivings, and traits of openness to experience); and (c) an ordinary cluster (characterized by commonplace personality functioning in relation to other exemplars and indistinguishable from their matched comparisons). The developmental roots of these different types of moral exemplars have yet to be examined; indeed, whether evidence of such personality coherence in childhood can be obtained is an open question.

The finding of multiple clusters accords with Flanagan’s (1991) claim of different varieties of moral personality but is inconsistent with Aristotle’s (trans. 1962) and Kohlberg’s (1981) positing of a single moral ideal. The distinctive moral personalities of exemplars in the communal and deliberative clusters were not predicted by the situational perspective, but, at the same time, the ordinary cluster was not predicted by the dispositional perspective. How best to make sense of this pattern? As it turns out, the ordinary cluster was predominantly comprised of bravery award recipients, whereas the other clusters were more populated by caring award recipients or were more balanced in their composition. This suggests that one-off heroic action may often be elicited by the powerful situational forces operating in emergency situations, whereas a “moral career” may be more dependent on sustained dispositional factors. Fleeson (2004) contends that both sides of the person–situation debate have some validity: The situational perspective has a good handle on momentary behaviors; the dispositional perspective better explains behavioral trends.

Enlightened Self-Interest

The framing of this chapter, in understanding moral motivation, has been the appropriation of morality as core to identity and personality. Conceptually, both Blasi (1983, 1984) and Damon (1984) argued that the centrality of morality to the self was a critical explanatory variable. Both trait-based and sociocognitive accounts have attempted, in some way, to tap the significance and salience of morality to individuals. In terms of personological accounts, recall Colby and Damon’s (1992) observation of the integration of personal and moral aspects in the lives of moral exemplars. All of these suggest the maneuver, in the development of moral motivation, of somehow reconciling the interests of self and others.

The fundamental themes in motivation are agency and communion (Bakan, 1966)—“getting ahead” and “getting along,” respectively (Hogan, 1982). Frequently, these dual motivations are conceptualized as mutually interfering and oppositional (e.g., Schwartz,
1992) and, certainly, in naturalistic conceptions of morality (Walker & Hennig, 2004; Walker & Pitts, 1998), the tension between self and other, between agency and communion, is apparent. While acknowledging that for most people, particularly earlier in the lifespan, these motivations are functionally antagonistic, Frimer and Walker (2009) proposed in their reconciliation model that, in moral maturity, agency and communion do become meaningfully integrated.

Recall the finding in Walker and Frimer’s (2007) study that moral exemplars evidenced high levels of both agency and communion in their life narratives, suggesting that both are strongly operative. However, their subsequent analyses failed to indicate any evidence of an interactive effect between these motives (beyond baseline levels). Frimer, Walker, Dunlop, Lee, and Riches (2011) returned to this issue, searching for evidence of synergistic integration between agency and communion among Canadian moral exemplars. Frimer et al. introduced a more precise conceptualization (and coding) of agency and communion that focused on promoting the interests of self and others, respectively—in contrast to a conceptualization of these motives that relates more to psychological distance (separation versus relatedness). They also compared the traditional variable-level analytic approach to assessing interactions with a person-level approach, in which integration is evidenced by the phenomenologically real co-occurrence of agency and communion within the same thought structure.

Frimer et al.’s analyses indicated that exemplars evidenced greater integration of agency and communion than comparisons across different measures, but only for the more precise conceptualization of agency and communion as promoting the interests of self and others, and only with the person-level analytic approach. This study provides the first empirical evidence that, in moral maturity, prosocially promoting the interests of others is also psychologically self-enhancing.

One of the limitations of Frimer et al.’s (2011) study was that the interaction between agency and communion was tapped by the co-occurrence of these motives in the same thought structure, which does not reveal the directionality between them. Thus, the co-occurrence of these motives could be of the form of agency promoting communion (e.g., “I’m working hard earning money to help the poor”) or of communion promoting agency (“I’m helping the poor in order to make money”), forms that have vastly different moral weight. To address this concern, Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, and Dunlop (2012) revised their coding procedure to assess the directionality between motives in an instrumental–terminal relationship (Rokeach, 1973).

Subjects in Frimer et al.’s (2012) study were influential people of the past century (as identified by Time magazine). A large sample of social-science experts rated these figures in terms of their moral exemplarity. The top-ranking figures were thus identified as moral exemplars (e.g., Nelson Mandela, Andrei Sakharov), and the bottom-ranking figures were identified as comparison subjects of similar influence (e.g., Kim Jong-il, Adolf Hitler). Since these historical figures were not available for research participation, archival materials (speeches and interviews) were accessed and coded for agency and communion and the relationship between these motives. Analyses revealed a clear pattern: Comparison figures embodied unmitigated agency (i.e., agency as instrumental to more agency), whereas the moral exemplars expressed instrumental agency for terminal communion—a moral motivational pattern that reflects enlightened self-interest. Having now identified
the moral motivation endpoint, the research enterprise should now turn to the developmental trajectories and junctures that explain its formation.

Summary

Ample evidence was presented on personological accounts of moral identity and motivation that reinforced the value of going beyond behavioral traits to also include a consideration of individuals’ more contextualized goal motivations and more idiographic life narratives. A wide range of personality variables were implicated as relevant to moral action, particularly as evidenced by moral exemplars who were often the object of study in this line of research, including the dual motivations of agency and communion, the tendency to adaptively redeem critical life events and to be characteristically optimistic, an expanded worldview and openness (as indicated by advanced epistemic reasoning), and intimations of advantage in earlier life (such as secure attachments, presence of helpful mentors, and sensitization to the needs of others).

The personological perspective was challenged by the claim of situational influences in moral action (reminiscent of a similar issue in the social–cognitive accounts of moral identity). The available evidence provided solace for both the dispositional and the situational perspectives, with a career of moral action being better explained by dispositional factors and momentary behaviors better accounted for by situational factors.

Perhaps the major theme in this section highlights the psychological maneuver of appropriating morality into one’s identity and personality—the moral self—such that one’s personal interests and fulfillment are accomplished by promoting the needs of others.

Some Concluding Questions and Future Directions

The challenging question, which has been the focus of this chapter, has been, “Wherein is the motivation to be moral?” When morality is primarily framed (as it typically is) as drear duty, onerous obligation, and selfless sacrifice, the enterprise, regardless of how noble and lofty in its aims, lacks psychologically realistic motivational force. The psychological maneuver repeatedly examined here was the developing appropriation of morality as core to individuals’ identity and personality functioning. Put otherwise, my contention is that morality can and should be self-regarding. When moral concerns are central to identity and motivation, then the pursuit of those moral concerns becomes essential to the self and is thereby self-enhancing.

But much more needs to be understood about moral motivation. The focus of research in this area has tended to be on mature aspects of moral identity and personality—the functional end point. Relatively little is known about the developmental roots and trajectories of moral motivation. What are the important cognitive understandings and processes that contribute to moral motivation? What are the parenting, community, and other socialization factors that can foster the development of a moral identity and personality (Hart, 2005)? What are the critical juncture points? Such developmental research will necessitate longitudinal studies and attention to identity and personality in its more nascent forms.

And there are broader questions as well: How can we assess the validity of notions of an evolutionary basis for moral functioning (Hamlin et al., 2007; Haidt, 2001; Pinker, 2008)
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with biological predispositions that constitute the moral mind? What can sociocognitive neuroscience contribute to our understanding of moral motivation?

Much of the research in the area of moral motivation, particularly as reviewed here, has centered on mature moral identity and moral exemplarity, cast in a uniformly positive light. But consideration needs to be given to the potential shadow side of such psychological functioning (as suggested by the research of Skitka & Morgan, 2009). Can an overactive moral identity lead to zealotry or hypermoralism? Are there costs to self and others in undertaking acts of heroism or in pursuing a moral career?

What is the causal nature of the relationship between moral motivation and moral behavior? The inclination is to hold that moral personality acts to implement moral behavior and to overlook the potential role that enacting behaviors might have on self-understanding, but there are indications that inducing appropriate action (e.g., through service learning) is conducive to the development of moral motivation (Youniss, 2009).

A related and perennial issue concerns the relative influence of dispositional and situational factors. In this chapter we reviewed evidence that was supportive of both perspectives, albeit in different ways. Certainly, there is abundant empirical support for a meaningful construct of moral character (Flanagan, 2009), but equally compelling is the evidence that contextual influences can function to activate or suppress such character. It now seems appropriate to move the debate along to the question of how dispositional and situational factors functionally interact in moral motivation.

References


Moral Identity Development and Community

M. Kyle Matsuba, Theresa Murzyn, and Daniel Hart

Morality, in its essence, requires agents whose needs and desires are embedded in social relationships, social institutions, and social groups. Without agents reflectively pursuing goals while aware that others are similarly motivated, there can be machines in motion but no morality (Flanagan, 1991). Relationships, communities, and cultures, therefore, make up the moral space in which life is lived because social life provides the meanings necessary for moral decisions (Taylor, 1989). In this chapter, we focus on the intersections of identity, community, and development, and weave together research that illuminates the development of each. In previous works, we have explored identity, development, and morality (e.g., Hart, 2005). However, in this chapter we add a focus on moral identity development in the context of community. While there are many conceptions of community, our focus is sociological with an emphasis on common expectations, values, and beliefs that people share and that influence their identity and selfhood (Smith, 2001).

Moral Philosophy and Community

Over the last 50 years, moral and political philosophies have explored the importance of community as it has been conceived in various ways for understanding ethical life. Much of this work can be understood as both a reaction and complement to a liberal philosophy positing universal principles of justice. John Rawls’ Theory of Justice (1992) is arguably the twentieth century’s most important exemplar of an exploration of moral universals. In this work, Rawls described how rational individuals, mindful of their own needs and desires and aware that others have broadly similar constitutions, could engage in reflective discussion to identify just social practices.

While Rawls’s argument was and continues to be enormously influential, many scholars have suggested that Rawls’s conclusions are undermined by a failure to appreciate the extent to which different communities of individuals fundamentally differ both in their constitutions of self and in their moral outlooks. Some of these critical scholars can be labeled as communitarian (e.g., MacIntyre, 1984; Taylor, 1989). Communitarians share the beliefs that: (a) social life varies substantially from one social group to another, and (b) social and
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cultural practices thoroughly infuse the self (Bell, 2009). Consequently, communitarians would argue that honest, moral deliberation among individuals from different communities may not converge toward agreement on what constitutes just moral practices because those involved in the discussion may have substantially and irreconcilably different notions of what needs and desires of self must be elevated and protected in moral life.

Moral communities have sets of shared norms that guide members’ behavior (Haidt, 2007). Haidt argues, from an evolutionary perspective, that these shared norms allow communities to survive and prosper or, to use his words, “bind and build” (p. 1000). Individual conduct is shaped by these norms as a result of people forming their identities vis-à-vis the collective (Appiah, 2005). In the case of moral norms, ethical obligations to act are internal to the self as a member of the collective. Collective-based identities can influence one’s interpretation and crafting of his or her sense of self, the life projects one pursues, and the meaning of one’s actions. The consequence is that communities can shape moral life by outlining moral responsibilities that are integrated into identities.

Community norms change over time. Appiah (2010) chronicles how historical changes in community norms, particularly those that affect one’s sense of honor, lead to moral transformations within societies. Honor, Appiah argues, arises from aligning one’s behavior and identity with the moral norms and standards of one’s community. By meeting these standards, one garners respect from others and gains pride in oneself. Failure to meet these standards contrastingly elicits contempt from others and produces shame toward oneself. We return to these ideas later in the chapter.

As reflected in recent trends in moral philosophy, we believe a deeper focus on the connection between communities and moral development is warranted. Yet the psychological literature on moral identity development has underemphasized the role that community has on the emergence of moral identity (see Hardy & Carlo, 2011). This is somewhat surprising given the historic centrality of community in identity development. In Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial model, the emphasis in understanding human development, including identity development, is on understanding how the self or ego interacts with society.

With regard to identity formation, the crisis youth face is determining who they are and where they are going in life. In their search for an adult identity, adolescents will explore new roles—from vocations to relationships and from religion to politics. However, in order for identity development to take place, one requires opportunities within one’s community for exploring these roles. We likewise argue that moral identity development requires opportunities within one’s community to explore and experience one’s moral self through actions.

A Model of Moral Identity Development

Over the last 15 years, we have explored moral identity development by considering the various possible factors that dynamically influence it (Hart, 2005). According to Hardy and Carlo (2011), moral identity is best represented by the degree to which morality is considered important to one’s identity. By “identity,” we mean the variety of experiences and psychological processes associated with the self (James, 1998). Identity involves the awareness of the self as the object of one’s reflection. In order for identity to develop, it requires the integration of different facets of the self into a coherent, unified whole that
continues to exist over time and across contexts. Extending this process to the moral domain, moral identity emerges when individuals both identify and integrate societal moral values and expectations among their self-ideals (Krettenauer, in press). In cases where morality becomes central to one’s identity, people will be motivated by an enlightened self-interest to act morally (Blasi, 1995).

The integration of moral values with expectations of the self involves many external influences and psychological processes, which we present in our model (see Figure 24.1). On the left side are the enduring personality and sociostructural factors of moral identity. They are stable and minimally impacted by environmental circumstances. Character adaptation variables capture the central elements of the figure and represent more direct influences on moral identity. These variables are more open to contextual influences. Below we present our model in greater detail, emphasizing the important influence community has on moral identity development.

**Enduring Features**

We believe that two general classes of enduring features are foundational to children’s development (Hart, 2005). Personality traits and types are one class and refer to the unique patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that individuals employ to interact in their world (Caspi, 1998). Traits are believed to be relatively stable over time and across situations. Some researchers claim that there are biological roots to personality as reflected in behavioral genetic studies. These studies claim that nearly half of the variance associated with
personality can be accounted for by genetic factors (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005; Jang, McCrae, Angleitner, Riemann, & Livesley, 1998). Evidence shows that specific personality traits, such as agreeableness (Matsuba & Walker, 2004), and personality types, such as overcontrolled individuals (Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2007), are related to moral behavior.

Recent work by Hamlin and Wynn (2011; see Wynn & Bloom, this volume) suggests that infants may be born with a tendency to be prosocial. Hamlin and Wynn had 3-month-old infants watch a puppet either give or take a ball from another puppet that was playing with it. Infants showed preferences for the “giving” rather than the “taking” puppet. This work illustrates that humans may have innate tendencies to evaluate social situations, and interact with prosocial versus antisocial others. Such tendencies are likely to be important precursors to cooperative behavior, which would be important in living within community.

The second general class of enduring features includes the broad social factors of family structure, socioeconomic status, culture, and other demographic variables. Plenty of research has emerged showing how these kinds of variables have significant impact on child development and health (Evans, 2004; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). With regard to moral identity development, these variables also play significant roles. Consider culture as an example. The moral values of a cultural community can be influential in children’s moral development and behavior. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the social opportunities a cultural community provides its people.

Characteristic Adaptations

Social Opportunities

In our own empirical work, we have focused on moral action in the form of voluntary community service (Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2007). While it is true that some individuals participate in community service work for nonmoral reasons (Clary et al., 1998; Wilson, 2000), there is sufficient evidence that voluntary community service can and often is motivated by altruistic intents (Hart, Atkins, & Donnelly, 2006) and can serve as the behavioral manifestation of the ethical principle of beneficence, or the moral foundation of care/harm (Haidt, 2012).

Volunteering is likely to be influenced by the moral values of American culture. From preindustrial times to the present, volunteering ensured the survival of rural communities by meeting critical needs (Shrestha & Cihlar, 2004). In the United States, the rate of volunteering has remained relatively stable over the past 20 years (Wilson, 2000), with the most recent report pegging the rate at 26.3% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Moreover, the annual monetary value of donated labor through volunteer work is estimated to be more than $173 billion (Independent Sector, 2002). In fact, so important is the spirit of service in American society that President Barack Obama, in the Chicago Tribune, spoke of it in his inaugural address:

What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility—a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that
there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task. This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

It may be that care and concern for others, which is often cited as the ethical principle behind volunteering, may form a master narrative that is woven into the fabric of American society (Thorne & McLean, 2003). Master narratives may be part of the culture that McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals (2007) write about in their process model of self-development. Stories of caring and sacrifice, as evidenced in sources from the Bible to Disney movies suggest that these values have deep roots in American culture. Their shared master narratives may help to structure or script people’s experiences (Habermas, 2007).

Given the cultural emphasis on care and concern, it is fitting that there are agencies in American society, such as the Peace Corps or Habitat for Humanity, through which people can volunteer to serve others. Volunteering through such institutions can facilitate one’s social networks and increase exposure to a variety of other social organizations (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000; Wilson, 2000). Not surprisingly, volunteers frequently report being recruited into their roles by family and friends (Independent Sector, 2002). Moreover, increased involvement in clubs and religious organizations has been shown to correlate with increased volunteering and voting among high school students (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). Even when community service work is mandated by schools, students showed increased interest in volunteering and civic participation compared to students where community service was not mandated (Metz & Youniss, 2003, 2005). Thus, being involved in a community can lead to further opportunities for involvement within that community.

However, not all neighborhoods within a society afford the same kinds of opportunities to participate in community. As Hart and Matsuba (2009) have shown, poor neighborhoods provide fewer opportunities for youth to become engaged as compared to their counterparts in more affluent areas. Consequently, one finds that youth volunteer more often in affluent areas. However, this finding is moderated by the concentration of children living in a neighborhood. Among affluent areas, the higher the concentration of children, the greater the level of volunteering is relative to areas where there are lower concentrations of children. In contrast, among poor neighborhoods, the lower the concentration of children, the lower the level of volunteering is relative to neighborhoods where there are lower concentrations of children. Hart and Matsuba argue that in poor areas, having an abundance of youth overwhelms the sparse community resources available to foster community engagement. Therefore, while society as a whole may promote acts of beneficence, not all neighborhoods may have opportunities to act accordingly. What our work and the work of others suggest is that these social opportunities need to be present in order for moral identity to develop and moral actions to follow.

Opportunities within one’s community for early and sustained experiences with moral values, thinking, emotions, and actions clearly matter in moral identity development. Early and sustained opportunities for such experiences are first likely to happen within the social context of families. Evidence demonstrates the importance of early socialization in moral development (Thompson, 2009; see Thompson, this volume). Thompson argues that early skills such as social referencing and theory of mind are important building blocks to children’s emerging sense of morality. Having a theory of mind allows children
to differentiate between their own desires, intentions, feelings, and beliefs and those of others. Social referencing allows children to rely on others to understand the significance of events and behaviors, and so contributes to children’s acquisition of behavioral standards and normative expectations. Behavioral standards that are violated are often met with disapproval. Parents are often the target of children’s social referencing, shaping their kids’ understanding of right and wrong. As children comply with maternal expectations or rules, they begin to see themselves as “good” boys and girls (Kochanska, 2002). Thus, children, through their socialization with parents and other adults, learn and internalize cultural moral standards (Kochanska & Thompson, 1997) such that rule compliance to these standards becomes internally motivated so as to be consistent with their inner selves.

**Self Systems**

While researchers have conceptualized moral identity development as involving the integration of the moral and self systems (see Bergman, 2002; Hardy & Carlo, 2011, for reviews), few have demonstrated empirically how these independent systems become integrated over time. With regard to the self system and its development, two related conceptions of the self have been described in the literature. Some understand the self as a mental representation that includes attributes such as one’s appearance, capabilities, relationships, and other psychological characteristics, which link to broader abstract self-concepts—daughter, student, being Jewish, etc.—in a network-like system (McConnell, 2011). In McConnell’s work, undergraduate students were asked to identify various self-aspects. The types of self-aspects students listed included relationships, roles, and goals. Curiously, the “moral self” was not a specific self-aspect category, suggesting that “morality” was not a salient broad construct associated with the self. However, moral attributes, such as trust or care for others, may link to other self-aspects, such as parent or friend. Apparently, morality is more diffusely linked to different self-aspects as opposed to forming an independent “moral” self-aspect.

Yet how self-representation develops remains unclear (McConnell, 2011). We do know that during early development, infants show signs of an emerging self. For instance, Rochat and Hespos (1997) found that 3-month-olds are able to discriminate between familiar and unfamiliar views of their own legs in motion. Hence, a perceptual awareness of both a self-perspective (as represented by the familiar view) versus an other-perspective (as represented by the unfamiliar view) is evident early in development. More explicit self-awareness emerges between 18 to 22 months as exhibited by the well-known rouge-mirror task (Kagan, 1981). With age, children’s self-concept becomes more elaborate (Harter, 1999), partly due to their increasing brain maturation (Giedd, 2008) and cognitive sophistication (Baddeley, 2007). Yet the exact processes by which self-representation changes over time are not well understood (McConnell, 2011).

The study of the self has also been linked to research on personal memories. Personal memories are those that are linked to different times and places that an individual chooses to use to define the self. Theories of self or narratives of self integrate different personal memories and self-representations in order to provide a coherent and unified self. McLean, Pasupathi, and Pals (2007), for instance, have proposed a process model of self-development, highlighting the transactional link between narrative and self-development.
They persuasively argue that with the emergence of situated stories (i.e., personal memories that are created within specific situations) comes the development of life stories and one’s self-concept in childhood. For instance, situated self stories in childhood can play an important role in self-development as these stories are integrated into one’s emerging life story. Events that are told repeatedly are more likely to contain personal meaning and thus have greater impact on the life story. Moreover, repeated behavioral experiences, or situated self stories, begin to be abstracted out and become people’s trait-like characteristics. Those important to the self become part of an individual’s self-aspects and attributes (McConnell, 2011). For example, people who continually experience and reflect on episodes of self involving caring and compassionate life events will begin to abstract out the self-attribute of caring.

The development of the narrative self is influenced by both individual and social factors. First, we know that by the age of 8 years, children have the knowledge and skills to be able to construct a narrative self, which then continues to improve through adolescence and into adulthood (Habermas, 2007). Second, we know that self-development is important to later narrative production: Children who were able to successfully perform the rouge-mirror task, thus demonstrating self-awareness, were more likely to show increased narrative production later in childhood (Reese, 2002). Third, we know that narrative self-development does not occur in isolation but requires social supports. For example, the relationship between self-development and narrative production mentioned earlier is mediated by how parents communicate these situated stories to their children (McLean et al., 2007). Children whose mothers used a reminiscing style to communicate these situated stories tended to have children who showed greater narrative production. Furthermore, one’s cultural community provides a “life script” by celebrating major role transitions and age-related event norms such as school graduations that help to frame people’s autobiography (Rubin & Berntsen, 2003). Once a life story emerges that brings together different situated stories and selves, such a life story will likely influence how future experiences are situated within the unfolding story (Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003; Singer & Blagov, 2004).

**Moral Orientation**

Historically, moral development has focused on reasoning. Plenty of evidence shows that children are able to reason about moral issues and that their reasoning becomes less concrete and more abstract with development (see Kohlberg, 1981; Rest, 1975; Turiel, 2006). Related theories further illustrate how moral reasoning becomes more interpersonal and ideological with development. Recently, researchers have expanded the moral domain in a number of interesting directions. One area has focused on the moral self with an emphasis on self-schema and intuitive–heuristic processing (Aquino, Freeman, Reed II, Lim, & Felps, 2009; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004). A schema is a mental representation or knowledge structure that people construct and retain about objects, events, experiences, and relationships. Moral identity may be construed as a schema in that people construct a mental representation of themselves—a self-schema—and part of that self-schema includes those moral values, goals, traits, and behavioral scripts that are deemed important to themselves. In cases where these moral values and related concepts are central to one’s self-schema, such moral self-schema will be more easily accessible for information processing.
as compared to other self-schemas (Aquino et al., 2009; Lapsley & Lasky, 2001). When the moral self-schema is activated, it has the potential to significantly influence moral actions.

An alternate perspective focuses on moral intuition (Haidt, 2001). Haidt argues that moral decisions are often based on intuitions, which are the fast, automatic responses that arise in moral situations involving good–bad or like–dislike quandaries. Intuitions are often affect-laden, and so contrast with the slower, deliberative and affect-neutral moral reasoning processes that involve conscious mental activities for making carefully deliberated moral judgments (Haidt, 2001). Moreover, an important feature in Haidt’s model is that moral intuitions precede moral reasoning, which is evident when people try to rationalize their moral judgments after making intuitive, affect-laden decisions about the rightness or wrongness of an act. For example, Haidt (2001) writes about incest between two consenting adults and eating a dead pet dog. Typically, people exposed to these situations are quick to react to the wrongfulness of the act, yet are “morally dumbfounded” in explaining why each is morally wrong. Haidt argues that “moral dumbfoundedness” occurs because people lack reflective access to the moral intuitions that yield moral decisions.

Yet from where do people’s moral intuitions come? According to Haidt and colleagues, moral intuitions emerge from innate moral modules (Haidt & Bjorklund, 2008). Haidt and Bjorklund argue that “some people are simply born with brains that are prone to experience stronger intuitions from individual moral modules” (p. 210). According to Haidt (2012), there are six modules that he refers to as moral foundations—care/harm, fairness as proportionality, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, and liberty/oppression. Through children’s learning, practicing, engaging in peer and adult interaction, and exposure to media, children’s moral foundations are “tuned” into specific, culturally constructed virtues (Haidt & Bjorklund, 2008). However, not every child is equally shapeable. Some children are simply born to be more responsive to their external environment than others. Based on their descriptions, moral modules appear to have many enduring qualities.

**Moral Emotions**

Increased research attention has also been placed on the affective bases of morality (e.g., empathy, guilt, shame, pride, and embarrassment) and when they emerge in development (Hoffman, 2000; Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007). For instance, toddlers have been shown to experience pride and guilt as a result of their successes and failures, compliances and disobediences (Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992). The development of these self-conscious emotions (Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007) requires the formation of a self, and the adoption of standards, many of which are learned and internalized within one’s community context such as the family, as mentioned above. These include moral standards that guide people on how to behave. Moral emotions such as pride or guilt experienced as a result of meeting or failing to meet one’s self expectations, respectively, can also serve to motivate people to action (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). For example, in our study of a national representative sample of Americans, we found that community pride predicted hours of volunteering (Hart & Matsuba, 2007). Therefore, opportunities need to exist in order for these moral standards to be internalized and connections to the affiliated thoughts, feelings, and actions to be built and strengthened. In cases where communities
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provide these opportunities, we can anticipate moral schemas to emerge and grow stronger in association with the ideal self.

On the other hand, there are occasions when societal moral standards are violated either intentionally or unintentionally. Bandura (1999) refers to these cases as examples of moral disengagement and has highlighted some of the associated psychological implications when people morally disengage from their own moral values, including the experience of cognitive dissonance that is created when there is a discrepancy between the moral self and the actual (i.e., disengaged) self. Dissonance certainly will be greater if the moral standards that are violated are intricately linked to the self. According to our previous research, however, this phenomenon may be less likely in impoverished areas since these communities provide fewer opportunities in which to build and strengthen moral standards within the self.

Moral violations impact one’s intuitive and emotional states, as mentioned previously (Haidt, 2001; 2007). Researchers have demonstrated how violations to one’s own internalized moral standards can lead to the self-conscious emotions of guilt or shame when one perceives the self as responsible for such outcomes (i.e., internal attribution) (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007; Tracy & Robins, 2007). Haidt reported that his participants often exhibited disgust in reaction to moral violations such as incest. Because participants were emotionally reacting to the moral violation committed by another person, emotions experienced in these kinds of situations have been referred to as “other-condemning” emotions (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999). In their work, Rozin et al. demonstrated that the other-condemning emotions of anger, contempt, and disgust are experienced by people when they witness others violating Shweder’s (2002) ethics of autonomy (e.g., rights of the individual), community (e.g., duty toward others, and concern for the group’s welfare), and divinity (e.g., pertaining to the divine or sacred), respectively. For instance, people may show contempt when others do not act with moral honor, as is demonstrated when one treats others fairly or with compassion.

**Moral Identity**

We believe that moral identity is shaped by the enduring qualities and characteristic adaptations we have described above, interacting dynamically with external factors to form a moral identity. One perspective on this process has been offered by Krettenauer (in press), who presents a detailed and integrated three-layer model of how moral selfhood develops in childhood. First to emerge is one’s moral self as an intentional agent. Between 3 to 5 years of age, children first show instrumental intentions (i.e., in one’s self-interest). By the age of 5, children begin seeing themselves in a moral light. For example, they are more likely to endorse “moral self” statements such as “feeling badly about doing the wrong thing.” However, it’s unlikely that they are able to suppress their own self-interested desires in order to act morally (Nunner-Winkler, 2007). According to Nunner-Winkler, children experience a disconnect between morality and the self, which may reflect their limited grasp of agency and responsibility. She demonstrated that while children acquire an understanding of moral rules, they are unable to suspend their own desires in order to act upon the moral rules. Second, children must see themselves as volitional agents (Krettenauer, in press). In order to behave morally, children must be able to suspend their
own desires. This is best exemplified in children’s developing ability to delay gratification (Mischel, 1974). Krettenauer suspects that by age 6 to 8 years, children may be able to act morally even in the face of immoral desires. It is during this period that children’s intent to act morally begins to move from an external (i.e., obedience to parents) to an internal obligation. Finally, children begin to identify themselves as moral agents. Krettenauer (in press) writes of the integration of morality and self whereby children act morally because morality is identified as part of the self. According to Krettenauer, rule internalization (Konchanska & Thompson, 1997) is an example of an early occurring process involved in moral self-identification. Further integration can occur when moral rules become associated with children’s ideal selves, leading to an emerging moral identity.

According to social cognitive theorists, once moral self-schema form, cognitive maturational factors will contribute to increasing the speed in which individuals can access those schemas. Personal reflection and dialog with parents and others about the meaning of social experiences, or situated stories, can further facilitate moral schema development (Lapsley & Hill, 2009; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004; McLean et al., 2007). For example, mental representations of performed moral actions lead to behavioral scripts in autobiographical memory. Consequently, these moral actions become more automatic, and the moral affect linked to these schemas in the cognitive network can be activated, motivating individuals toward or away from similar behaviors in the future (Reimer, 2003). Important within this perspective is the emphasis on the cognitive processes operating to integrate moral-related experiences, reasoning, affective mechanisms, self-systems, action sequences, and intuitions together to aid people in their moral deliberations and actions (Narvaez, 2008). Through repeated experiences via direct instruction, general exposure, and practice within and outside the family, the connections between moral schemas and the self can become strengthened. The greater the experiences in making moral judgments, the more automatic people’s responses become. They gain wisdom: They become experts (Narvaez, 2008).

In summary, our model of moral identity attempts to integrate various bodies of research in moral psychology to illustrate the many factors that go into creating a moral identity and how they may dynamically interact. Often missing in other perspectives on moral personality and identity development and what our model emphasizes are the enduring qualities of the person and the social–cultural context in which they are embedded. What we have attempted to do in this chapter is to illustrate the role that culture and community play in shaping the many facets that influence moral identity development. For example, the cultural narrative into which we are born shapes our own personal narrative. This is reflected in the moral virtues we adopt and the moral standards we set for ourselves. These virtues and standards are internalized through socialization with others in our family and our community. As we enter into adolescence, these sustained opportunities to reason through moral dilemmas, express our moral virtues, and live up to our moral standards becomes important, in that having these moral facets become part of who we are as people and shapes our moral identity as it develops. Consequently, exceeding or violating these standards can have affective and behavioral ramifications. However, not all communities within a society afford equal opportunities for children to have sufficient exposure to parents and other adults so as to internalize their moral rules and virtues, and those of the larger society. When the moral foundations of a community break down, there seems to be socioeconomic consequences to the members living within.
Thus far our focus has been on moral identity generally, with volunteering often acting as our representation of the construct given our own empirical work (Matsuba et al., 2007). Yet there are other ways to operationalize moral identity. In the remaining space, we wish to extend our model of moral identity into the area of environmentalism in hopes that we can shed light on the dynamic influences on people’s environmental identity and actions, emphasizing the important roles culture and community have on shaping these developments.

Environmentalism, Identity, and Community

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) (2012) identifies six environmental areas in which it works, including climate change, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, harmful substances, and resource efficiency. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (2012) also identifies a broad number of environmental topics that fall within its mandate, including issues dealing with air, climate change, environmental emergencies, green living, health and safety, land and clean up, pesticides, chemicals and toxics, and waste and water. The diversity of environmental issues addressed by these and many other agencies is illustrative of the breadth associated with the concept of environmentalism as well as its importance in American society.

There is no doubt that debates about environmental issues are discussed with moral vocabulary and experienced as ethical issues. These debates often reflect conflicting ideological perspectives with regard to the role of the environment in our way of life. Such perspectives are illustrated in the recent debate revolving around the Keystone XL pipeline proposal to pipe oil from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico (TransCanada, 2012). Oil companies are likely to adopt an anthropocentric perspective by assigning greater intrinsic value to human beings than animals since the professionals’ concern is to create monetary profits for their shareholders. In contrast, other stakeholders, such as the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), have come out against the pipeline. The NCAI’s concern is that the pipeline would harm people and negatively impact future generations. Its concern also extends to how the pipeline will affect the land and animals because it treats both as having intrinsic value: The land, water, and wildlife are things that have meaning in and of themselves. They have spirits and are treated as sacred (Davis, 2008), so there is a moral duty to protect them. In fact, some view the land as a community of which we are members. Thus, as members we are responsible for the preservation of this community (Leopold, 1949).

Views about the natural environment develop over the course of childhood and adolescence and reflect the prevailing norms. As Davis (2007) points out, “A child raised to believe that a mountain is the abode of a protective spirit will be a profoundly different human being from a youth brought up to believe that a mountain is an inert mass of rock ready to be mined” (p. 65). As this quote illustrates, cultural upbringing and experiences shape the trajectory of our development into individuals with beliefs about the natural world. This is particularly evident in the research on environmental activists (e.g., Chan, 2009; Chawla, 1999; Horwitz, 1996). In this work, a number of salient themes have emerged. For example, early childhood opportunities to interact in the environment have been identified as a common theme among activists (Chawla, 2007; Louv, 2008; Wells
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& Lekies, 2006). Early exposure to and interaction with green spaces are common experiences activists share. James, Bixler, and Vadala (2010) have also reported that activists during their youth had a sustained involvement in environmental issues through their participation in organizations such as Scouts and summer camps. These experiences seemed to facilitate children's environmental knowledge and skill development, and to solidify their environmental values, beliefs, and norms. Finally, activists’ sustained environmental involvement, social interactions with like-minded others, and exploratory nature all contributed to the “crystallization” of their identity with their environmental work (James et al., 2010). This appears to be a very similar process identified by Colby and Damon (1992) in describing their sample of moral exemplars. Among both moral exemplars and environmental activists, sustained involvement in their work leads to a merging of self with their work so that what they do becomes an extension of who they are.

The above research further suggests that community, by offering opportunities to interact with the environment, can play a significant role is shaping one's environmental identity and behavior. Recent quantitative empirical work lends support to this claim (Fernandes & Matsuba, 2012). In their study of environmental activists, Fernandes and Matsuba found that activists, as opposed to comparison group individuals, were more embedded in community based on the number of community organizations activists mentioned in their life narratives and their self-reported involvement in community. One explanation for this tendency comes from studies conducted by Weinstein, Przybylaski, and Ryan (2009). In their work, they found that exposing people to scenes of nature versus human-made scenes (i.e., urban landscape) led to feelings of autonomy and relatedness, which in turn caused people to focus on intrinsic values such as relationship and community rather than on personal gains. Thus, communities that provide opportunities for children to be exposed to nature may nurture children to become more community-minded in their identity and behavior.

From a social cognitive perspective, these experiences in nature, many of which are socially facilitated through family experiences, community organizations, and school programs, are important in creating both cognitive schemas of our world and cognitive scripts for how to behave in that world. Children who are immersed in wilderness experiences will create a world schema where nature is prominent and behavioral scripts on how to act in nature. They are likely to develop knowledge about and skills involving life in nature and unlikely to develop a fear of a foreign wilderness (Luov, 2008).

Further, work on moral emotions helps us to understand the emotional outrage many environmentalists have toward the destruction of wilderness by others. In northern British Columbia there is a vast alpine basin, called the “Sacred Headwaters,” where the Skeena, Nass, and Stikine rivers originate. It is home to many First Nations communities and is an important habitat for wildlife including sheep, caribou, wolf, bear, and salmon. Royal Dutch Shell is in current negotiations to drill for gas in this region. Considering the cultural sacredness of this place for many, it should be of no surprise that some people have expressed both disgust and anger at the prospects of an outside company defiling the land they consider sacred and significantly altering their way of life as a result (Sacred Headwaters, 2012).

Yet other people with fewer ties to this land, to the community, and to nature in general may not share the same moral outrage or engage in environmental actions when
wilderness spaces, such as the Sacred Headwaters, are in jeopardy. In fact, there is an increasingly growing concern that too many of our young people are failing to see wilderness spaces as sacred and worthy of preservation (Wray-Lake, Flanagan, & Osgood, 2010). This could be due, in part, to youth having few opportunities to engage in nature. Consequently, these youth may contribute to environmental generational amnesia effect (Kahn, 2002). According to Kahn (2002), people construct a conception of nature based on what they experienced in childhood. Due to the degradation of our natural environment, each generation tends to take their degraded experience of nature as the norm. Hence, for many of our children today, their cognitive conception of nature and wildlife may be urban parks and animals in zoos. These children have little attachment to wilderness spaces such as the Sacred Headwaters. Even worse, Louv (2008) suggests that as a result of people’s lack of experience in wilderness, it becomes a foreign and feared place, leading to less interest in exploring these places and less concern about its continual demise (Louv, 2008).

In this section, we attempted to understand environmental identity development from a moral perspective, borrowing from our model, and to emphasize the importance of culture and community in shaping this development. People’s beliefs about and identification with the environment are clearly shaped by the community context in which they are raised. Further, research on environmentalism and environmental activists demonstrates the important function of society to provide early opportunities for children to interact with the environment. Such opportunities are important in shaping our thoughts, emotional responses, identity, and behaviors toward the environment. Unfortunately, fewer opportunities for children to access nature may be leading to less concern about and care for the environment, which should cause all of us some worry in terms of the long-term impact of our ever-growing human footprint that is being left on our planet.

Conclusion

Moral development occurs in community contexts. Our review therefore suggests that the time is ripe for research that examines the intersections of community, identity, and moral development. Trends in Western culture and moral philosophy suggest that an awareness of the intertwining of community and morality is growing, perhaps driven by forces linked to globalization and the Internet that illuminate differences in norms and values among peoples of the world.

Moral development can be elucidated by studying community influence, but not by reducing the former to the latter. We reject claims that moral development is largely the product of internalizing community values and norms. Durkheim stated that “there is only one moral power—moral, and hence common to all—which stands above the individual and which can legitimately make laws for him, and that is collective power” (1958, p. 7). His assertion is representative of the cultural socialization perspective according to which moral development can be understood as the adaptation of individuals to the demands of the enveloping cultural traditions of the local community. But such a perspective obscures, rather than illuminates, moral development. Throughout our review, we highlighted the importance of evolving cognitive constructions of self, identity, and social relationships for understanding moral development.
We have suggested instead that the contributions of communities to moral development are most likely illuminated at the intersections of community influences and norms with evolving notions of self, identity, and morality. We have suggested rather than demonstrated the value of examining these intersections because there is relatively little relevant research. We hope that our chapter encourages research on how community influences shape representations and schemas of self and their salience in moral functioning; cause the integration of values, moral principles, and representations of self into moral identities; sensitize individuals to moral issues and lines of moral action that can shape lives of moral commitment, as in the example of environmental activism; and contribute to the construction of narratives that provide coherence to moral life. Examining these intersections increases the complexity of a model of moral development, but it will yield a richer, more satisfying account of moral life as it is experienced and enacted.

References


Moral Identity Development and Community


This chapter will focus upon the development of concepts about social actions that individuals consider to be personal matters of choice and privacy that fall outside of considerations of right and wrong (Nucci, 1981, 1996; Nucci & Turiel, 2000; Smetana, 2006). By definition, the personal is positioned in a dialectical relationship with the norms and conventions of society, and moral considerations of interpersonal welfare and individual rights. The contribution of the personal to moral growth stems from those interactions (Nucci & Turiel, 2007) and from the role the personal plays in constructing moral concepts about rights as freedoms (Helwig, 2006; Helwig, Ruck, & Peterson-Badali, this volume; Nucci, 1996, 2000). This chapter will explore those interrelationships following a discussion of research findings on the emergence of the personal in early childhood, its function in psychological development, and its cultural generality.

Foundations and Theory

As described in other chapters in this volume, social cognitive domain theory proposes that social cognition is structured within basic conceptual frameworks that account for qualitatively differing components of our social interactions (Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, this volume; Turiel, 1983, this volume). The basic domains that have been defined to date are: moral (concepts about fairness, harm, welfare, and rights); societal (concepts about social organization, social systems, and social conventions); and psychological (concepts about persons, self, identity, and internal states). Reasoning about personal issues is structured by conceptions of the role that decisions over personal and private matters have for the construction of what is socially individual or unique about the decision maker (Nucci, 1996), and related understandings of the function that control over those decisions has for the establishment of agency and autonomy (Helwig, 2006). Within social cognitive domain theory concepts about personal issues are considered to be part of the psychological domain of conceptions about personhood, self, and identity (Nucci, 1996; Smetana et al, this volume; Turiel, 1983).
Studies with children and adolescents have determined that the content of personal diaries, phone calls, and letters (and who should have access to them); aspects of personal appearance; form of play or recreation during free time; and control over one’s own body (such as food preferences) are examples of issues that are treated as personal (Nucci, 1981, 1996; Smetana, 2002). Individuals justify their selection of issues as personal on the grounds that they are matters that primarily impact the actor, and that control over those decisions and activities is important to their sense of autonomy and individuality (Helwig, 2006; Nucci, 1996). These justifications point toward an internally consistent framework for reasoning about personal matters that is quite distinct from the ways in which individuals conceptualize the societal and interpersonal functions and purposes of social conventions and evaluations of moral actions.

Prototypical situations involving personal judgments, such as choosing what color shirt to wear, will primarily involve personal reasoning. A basic premise of social cognitive domain theory, however, is that many social situations are multifaceted and may engage concepts across domains (Smetana et al., this volume; Turiel, 1983). This is the case with judgments about the personal in contexts that also elicit reasoning about morality or social conventions. For example, a judgment about what color shirt to wear ceases to be solely a personal matter in social contexts where dress is prescribed by local conventions such as a school or work setting, or in the military (Nucci, 2000; Smetana & Bitz, 1996). Smetana’s (2011) extensive research with adolescents and parents has illustrated how differing perspectives on the personal rather than prudential or conventional nature of social events, such as dress, serves as a source of adolescent–parent conflict. As will be discussed below, the intersection between what is personal and conventional varies considerably across cultures, although the basic claim to a personal zone of privacy and choice appears to be a cultural universal.

One’s personal decisions also may intersect with morality. First, as will be discussed further below, claims to a personal zone inform the construction of moral concepts of rights as freedoms (see Helwig et al., this volume; Nucci, 1996). Second, one’s personal decisions can have moral implications that extend beyond the immediate personal action or choice. For example, the decision to drink coffee rather than tea is a personal matter. Drinking coffee is an action that primarily impacts the self, does not constitute an issue of harm or welfare, and is not in conflict with Western social conventions. From the perspective of the individual, one’s preference for coffee is an action that is emblematic of personal autonomy. However, deciding whether to buy coffee from one vendor rather than another may have moral ramifications stemming from the farming practices employed to grow the coffee beans, and whether the growers and vendors compensate their workers fairly. An individual attending to these implications would engage both their personal decision making (preferring coffee to tea) and moral concepts centering on concerns for fair and safe labor practices in selecting a brand of coffee that was both personally satisfactory and morally right. In so doing, the individual would be engaged in what social domain theorists characterize as domain coordination (see Smetana et al., this volume). As will be discussed in greater detail below, one aspect of moral development is the increased capacity to coordinate moral considerations with personal goals and interests in multifaceted social situations.
Research on the Personal

Social Interactions and Personal Concepts in Early Childhood

The identification and differentiation of what is personal from actions defined by social convention or moral obligation is thought to emerge from social interactions in early childhood. A robust area of research has investigated this hypothesis. In one of the early foundational studies, mapping out the methodology for observations of the interactions between American preschool-aged children and their mothers revealed three distinctive patterns of interaction associated with personal issues (Nucci & Weber, 1995). In the least commonly observed pattern, mothers explicitly labeled certain things as simply up to the child. In about half of the observed interactions, however, the discourse around personal issues was more indirect, and the mother tacitly conveyed the notion that the issue was a personal matter as in the following question posed by a mother to her daughter: “Have you decided what to wear today?”

The first two patterns describe interactions in which mothers are guiding or scaffolding the child’s construction of areas of discretion. However, a third pattern accounting for over one fifth of the social interactions around personal issues involved resistance from the child and negotiation with the mother. The researchers reported that nearly all of the resistance to mothers was in the context of actions that the researchers had blind-coded as personal matters (Nucci & Weber, 1995). In contrast, the children complied nearly as often to maternal directives in response to children’s transgressions of social conventions (e.g., table manners), and in nearly all of the incidents involving a moral transgression (e.g., taking away a toy from a sibling). This pattern of resistance to parents indicates that children and are not engaging in general noncompliance. This pattern is also evidence that children are not simply acquiring a sense of the personal from adult social messages, but are actively laying claim to a personal zone apart from social regulation and moral obligation (Killen & Nucci, 1995; Nucci & Turiel, 2000).

The proposal that much of young children’s observed resistance to parental directives stems from children’s claims to issues as personal matters received additional support from a recent study investigating children’s predictions about compliance to maternal rules prohibiting engagement in personal activities or choices that were connected with the child’s identity and sense of self (Lagattuta, Nucci, & Bosacki, 2010). This study also provided support for the general hypothesis that control over personal matters is connected to concepts about self and the individual. The procedure entailed providing children with hypothetical scenarios through line drawings depicting children engaged in actions that the mother then made a rule against. Personal domain actions included choices of friends, play activities, and clothing. These were presented in two conditions varying the centrality of the action to the child’s self. In order to determine whether any resistance to the mother’s rule was simply a function of the high desirability of the personal actions, a third condition was added in which the child needed to engage in a moral transgression involving stealing or harm to another child in order to achieve the essential personal domain action. Following the presentation of each story the child was asked to make a prediction about the child’s behavior and attendant feelings.
Findings for the moral situations in which the child must either steal from or harm the other child in order to engage in the desired activity were consistent with prior studies using moral stimuli (Lagattuta, 2005, 2008). As the children increased in age from 4 to 7 years old, they were more likely to predict compliance with the maternal rule against the immoral action (stealing or hitting), and were also more likely with age to predict that the child in the story would be happy if s/he did comply and would feel negative emotions if s/he disobeyed the mother’s rule and engaged in the moral transgression. In addition, the children provided justifications for their predictions that were consistent with the moral nature of the transgressions. In contrast with the findings from the moral scenarios, there were no age-related changes in children’s predictions about compliance with maternal rules to refrain from engagement in the behaviors that were personal matters and described activities central to the child’s sense of self. From the ages 4 to 7 years, the children predicted greater levels of noncompliance to mothers’ directives about these personal behaviors than they did to moral transgressions that would have allowed the children in the stories to engage in those same essential personal activities. Moreover, the children across ages predicted that the children in the stories would feel good about noncompliance, and would feel bad if they obeyed the mother’s rule prohibiting the personal behavior. As anticipated by the study’s authors, the justifications that accompanied the predictions of noncompliance for maternal rules governing personal actions focused upon the impact of compliance upon the child’s identity (Lagattuta et al., 2010).

Interview and survey research conducted with mothers of young children in the United States indicates that middle-class mothers are generally sensitive to their young children’s needs for an area of personal discretion (Nucci & Smetana, 1996; Nucci & Weber, 1995: Smetana, 2010). In the studies referencing the youngest children, Smetana and colleagues (Smetana, Kochanska, & Chuang, 2000) reported that American mothers begin to refer to justifications for allowing children personal discretion based on children’s psychological needs for autonomy once children reach about 2 years of age. Interviews conducted with Japanese mothers of young children (3 to 6 years of age) indicate that such sensitivities are not limited to mothers in Western society (Yamada, 2004). Japanese mothers reported granting children choices over recreational activities, clothes, and friends to foster autonomy and competence. Mothers in the Yamada (2004) study reported experiencing conflicts with their young children around issues such as those described in the observational study of U.S. children (Nucci & Weber, 1995) and reported employing negotiation and distraction to resolve the disputes. However, the Japanese mothers interpreted their children’s resistance as egocentric rather than as serving to establish the children’s personal boundaries. Similar findings were reported with a sample of Taiwanese Canadian mothers (Chuang, 2006).

Observations of social interactions in U.S. preschool settings complement the findings from the home (Killen & Smetana, 1999). Similar to the mothers observed in home settings, preschool teachers employed more direct messages regarding moral and social conventional events than in the context of interactions around personal issues. Also, similar to mothers, teachers offered children choices in the context of personal matters. Unlike the mothers, however, teachers rarely negotiated personal events with children. Children in this study were interviewed about their conceptions of personal issues. Children judged that they should retain control over personal issues in both home and school contexts (Killen & Smetana, 1999).
The outcomes of the Lagattuta et al. (2010) study discussed above illustrated the connection between children’s claims to a personal domain and the establishment of a sense of self and individuality. Earlier interview research had established that children and adolescents explicitly defend their claims to control over issues of privacy and personal choice as important to their sense of self and individuality (Nucci, 1977, 1996, 2001). The developmental changes in children’s and adolescents’ concepts of the personal were found to map onto developmental changes in concepts of self and identity (Damon & Hart, 1988). These developmental studies are concordant with the basic premise of social cognitive domain theory that concepts about personal choice and privacy are an aspect of the psychological domain of social knowledge (Nucci, 1996; Turiel, 1983).

These connections to conceptions of self led to the proposition that external constraints over the ability of individuals to establish a personal zone would lead to psychological distress (Nucci, 1996). Research had established that parental overcontrol is associated with internalizing disorders such as anxiety and depression among adolescents (Barber, 1996; Barber, Stolz & Olsen, 2005; Dornbusch et al., 1985; Kakihara & Tilton-Weaver, 2009; Kakihara, Tilton-Weaver, Kerr, & Stattin, 2010). The hypothesis emerging from the research on the connections between the self and the personal was that the negative impact of parental control is due to the overexertion of control and parental interference in the personal. Parental control exerted in relation to moral, conventional, and safety norms in contrast was hypothesized to be associated with normative development.

The first study to test this hypothesis (Hasebe, Nucci, & Nucci, 2004) was conducted with American adolescents and adolescents from a Japanese high school. Participants were given a survey that asked them to indicate on a five-point scale who in their own family situation would control or decide a series of behaviors that included prudential, conventional, and personal items along with items that comprised an overlap between personal and either conventional or prudential considerations. Each participant also filled out a checklist of psychological symptoms asking for self-reports of feeling or being distressed by each symptom. Findings were that adolescent perceptions of who (themselves or their parents) controls decisions about their personal behaviors was significantly associated with self-reports of symptoms indicative of internalizing disorders such as anxiety, depression, and somatization for adolescents in both countries. Parental control over conventional and prudential issues was not associated with self-reports of internalizing disorders in either country.

These findings were recently replicated in a study with urban and rural adolescents from the city of Guangzhou and a rural village in the northern region of Guandong province of Mainland China (Helwig, Nucci, Yang, Yun, & To, 2009). These researchers found that adolescents in the rural areas tended to cede greater authority to parents over conventional and prudential activities than did the urban adolescents, but rural and urban youth did not differ in their claims to control over the personal. The analyses of the relations between perceived parental control and their self-reports of internalizing disorders followed a pattern quite similar to what researchers had observed in Japan (Hasebe et al., 2004). In both the urban and rural samples there were no associations between perceived parental control over prudential and conventional issues and psychological symptoms, but there were significant correlations between parental control over personal issues and self-reports of internalizing disorders.
The research reported from Japan and China supports the basic theoretical proposition that control over a personal zone is important to the maintenance of psychological integrity and mental health. These findings also indicate that the personal is not limited to Western society (an issue to be discussed below). However, it would be a mistake to suggest that the parameters of the personal are the same for individuals across cultures. Smetana’s (2011) work with middle-class African American adolescents and families is a case in point. Her work has shown that the ages at which parents cede control over overlapping issues that contain both personal elements of choice and privacy and prudential elements of safety, such as how late a teenage child can stay out on a weekend night, or how far a teen can venture from home differ from and are later than the ages at which middle-class White parents allow their teenage children to handle such decisions. When middle-class White parents continue to control such behavioral choices to the ages at which African American parents modally allow their children control, the White American adolescents self-report higher levels of depression than their peers. Conversely, when African American parents cede control to their teens at the younger ages modal for White middle-class teens, the African American adolescents report higher levels of internalizing disorders and higher rates of engagement in at-risk behaviors than when parents delay such freedoms.

**Issues of Culture**

The findings discussed above from Japan (Hasebe et al., 2004; Yamada, 2004) and China (Helwig et al., 2009) are part of a growing body of work examining concepts about the personal outside of Western purportedly individualist societies. Table 25.1 presents a partial listing of studies on the personal that have been conducted since 1994 in countries other than the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. The cumulative weight of evidence from this research is that considerations of personal choice and privacy are a fundamental human concern. This is not to say that there are no cultural variations in the content and scope of what gets included within the personal zones of individuals. Cultures differ in the extent to which particular forms of personal expression and behavior are up to the individual and which fall within the confines of the conventions of society (Miller, Das, & Chakravarthy, 2011; Miller & Bland, this volume; Nucci & Turiel, 2000).

Indeed, each of the studies that explored the impact of parental control over the personal zones of adolescents in the United States, Japan, and China reported above (Hasebe et al., 2004; Helwig et al., 2009; Nucci et al., 2012) had to make adjustments in specific items treated as personal within each cultural setting. These cultural differences in areas of personal discretion and privacy, while sometimes subtle, are most certainly significant. However, the fields of developmental and cultural psychology have begun to move away from the notion that the world’s cultures can be neatly divided up into those that are individualistic and rights-based (primarily Western), and those that are collectivist and duty-based (non-Western) (Miller & Bland, this volume) and presumably without room for a personal zone of privacy and personal choice. A recent comprehensive meta-analysis of the literature found no consistent associations between the individualism–collectivism dichotomy and culture (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Indeed, the more accurate picture of cultures is that they are complex and heterogeneous with respect to the expression of individual and collectivist orientations (Turiel, 2002).
TABLE 25.1 Partial List of Studies on the Personal Conducted Outside of North America and Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Lins-Dyer &amp; Nucci, 2007</td>
<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Milnitsky, Turiel, &amp; Nucci, 2006</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nucci, Camino, &amp; Sapiro, 1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Darling, Cumsille, &amp; Martinez, 2007</td>
<td>•</td>
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<td>China</td>
<td>Helwig, Yang, Tan, Liu, &amp; Shoa, 2011</td>
<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helwig, Nucci, Yang, Yun, &amp; To, 2009</td>
<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Ardilla-Rey &amp; Killen, 2001</td>
<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Neff, 2001</td>
<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Yau &amp; Smetana, 1996</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yau &amp; Smetana, 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Assadi, Smetana, Shahmansouri, &amp; Mohammadi, 2011</td>
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<td>Israel</td>
<td>Nisan, 1996</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Hasebe, Nucci, &amp; Nucci, 2004</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kinosita &amp; Kinoshita, 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nucci, Smetana, Araki, Nakaue, &amp; Comer, 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yamada, 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yamada, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Park, Lee-Kim, Killen, Park, &amp; Kim, 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Cherney &amp; Sing, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Darling, Cumsille, &amp; Pena-Alampy, 2005</td>
<td>•</td>
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<td>Zambia</td>
<td>Zimba, 1994</td>
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A considerable amount of the work exploring the personal domain in non-Western cultures has been conducted in family contexts. To a surprising degree, the results of these studies report similar dynamics both in terms of mother–child relations in early development, and in the general trend toward an expansion in adolescence of issues considered to be personal matters as reported by Smetana and her colleagues (Smetana, 2011). These cross-cultural studies have also detected a set of general trends in which parents and children in rural and lower-class families report somewhat higher levels of parental control than in urban and middle-class settings (e.g., Nucci, Camino, & Sapiro, 1996; Helwig et al., 2009). What is interesting is that higher levels of parental control has not translated into an across-the-board trend of greater acceptance of parental control over the personal area by rural and lower-class adolescents. For example, a study exploring mother–daughter relations in northeastern Brazil found that lower- and middle-class daughters did not differ in their expectations over who should control or decide about their personal zones of activity (Lins-Dyer & Nucci,
However, lower-class adolescent girls reported experiencing higher levels of control by their mothers and of engaging in higher rates of mother–daughter conflict than did their middle-class counterparts. Darling and her colleagues (2005) reported a similar phenomenon of social class–related levels of adolescent–parent conflict among adolescents in the Philippines. These findings challenge cultural psychology assumptions that social development is a steady process of children adopting and internalizing the social values of the adult culture (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). More importantly for our discussion here is the finding of a general cross-national pattern of children’s acceptance of parental rules around issues of morality, convention, and personal safety, and resistance or noncompliance around issues that children and adolescents interpret to be within their personal domain. As noted above, these general patterns have held across social class and region.

The observed resistance by children to adult authority that extends into their perceived personal areas has a parallel in the resistance that has been noted among women in patriarchal societies toward strictures placed upon them by their husbands (Neff, 2001; Turiel & Wainryb, 2000). One of the fascinating findings to emerge from this research is the perception that husbands and wives in hierarchical societies have of the same social norms that give greater privileges and freedoms to men than to women. The men tend to view their greater autonomy in rights terms. Men also tend to view the lesser roles and autonomy of women and girls as consistent with gender-prescribed duties. Put another way, men view themselves as having an expanded personal area, whereas women are constrained by conventions. Women within these same cultures also interpreted their social roles as defined by social conventions. However, the women also expressed views that existing social arrangements denying women’s autonomy are unfair. At an individual level, the women were cognizant of a set of claims to personal choice and privacy being denied them under the present cultural arrangements (Turiel, 2002).

The Personal and Moral Concepts of Rights

The views expressed by the women in the studies referred to above (Neff, 2001; Turiel & Wainryb, 2000) point toward the connections between the personal and moral concepts of rights. Individual claims to areas of privacy and prerogative are implicit demands for noninterference from others. As described above, these claims to a personal zone are tied to underlying psychological concepts about the requirements for selfhood, autonomy, and identity. Constraints upon the capacity to form a personal area are experienced as a form of loss, harm, or unfairness (Nucci, 1996). The research described above reporting on the connections between the loss of the personal zone through parental overcontrol and internalizing disorders (Hasebe et al., 2004; Helwig et al., 2009; Nucci et al., 2012) makes it clear that the denial of a personal zone does indeed result in harm. Just as the experience of physical harm is employed to construct basic concepts of morality, the experiences and social interactions around the personal are employed to construct moral concepts of rights as freedoms (Nucci, 1996, 2001). Moral concepts about rights extend beyond concerns for freedoms, and a fuller discussion of rights is the topic of Helwig and colleague’s chapter (this volume). Rights as freedoms have been distinguished, for example, from nurturance rights that children may claim in relationship to parents (Ruck, Abramovitch, & Keating, 1998), and basic human rights of safety and welfare (Dworkin, 1978).
The notion that moral concepts of rights as freedoms stem from the construction of a personal zone that is itself a fundamental component of intact psychological functioning is concordant with Western philosophical treatments of rights as fundamental to human flourishing (Dworkin, 1978; Gewirth, 1982; Nussbaum, 2001). The extant cross-cultural research pointing toward the existence of claims to a personal zone, and to the psychological impact of constraints upon the personal lends support to the notion that concerns about rights are not confined to “rights-based” societies (Turiel, 2008). Here again, however, it would be a mistake to move from the general existence of shared human concerns and common psychological requirements to a notion of cross-cultural universality in the ways in which rights as freedoms are structured and experienced (Miller, Das, & Chakravarthy, 2011; Miller & Bland, this volume). In his philosophical critique of the notion of general right to freedom, Gewirth (1982) argues that evidence of claims individuals make of their primary interests or needs cannot serve as the basis for rights, since this does not deal with why rights would not be particularistic ones that match inequalities as suit the differences among individuals (e.g., relative intelligence, social position). In offering this critique, Gewirth (1982) anticipates the sorts of “rights claims” Wainryb and Turiel (1994) describe men in traditional societies as making in relation to their wives and daughters. Such “rights claims” based on their gender status establish a set of “universal inequalities,” and as such conflate privilege with moral worth. What are sometimes referred to as “duty-based” societies (Shweder et al., 1987) codify these inequalities as normative.

What is being claimed here is not that concepts about the personal are themselves moral concepts of rights, but that an understanding of the psychological functions of personal choice and privacy, and the claims that children and adolescents make regarding choice and privacy, inform the construction of morality (Nucci, 1996, 2001). This occurs in two ways. First, as already discussed, concepts about the personal inform the construction of moral concepts of rights. Second, the dialectic between claims to individual discretion and choice, and moral obligations for fair treatment and considerations of the welfare of others, inform the construction of moral concepts of interpersonal moral obligation. In classical theories of moral development, these interactions between the personal and morality have been captured within early stages of egocentrism (Piaget, 1932), or preconventional morality (Kohlberg, 1984), in which self-interest is thought to guide moral thinking. Within the social cognitive domain theory framework, however, considerations of personal choice and privacy and moral concepts of rights, fairness, and human welfare coexist as distinct conceptual frameworks throughout the lifespan. Thus, we would anticipate evidence of developmental shifts in the ways in which considerations of the personal and moral are coordinated, along with evidence of nondevelopmental influences of context. We would not expect to see evidence of a developmental period in which considerations of either the personal or moral are subsumed by one domain. Some recent research looking into these developmental and contextual factors are the subject of the next section.

**Moral Development and the Personal**

A recently completed study (Nucci & Turiel, in progress) explored age-related changes in reasoning about three basic moral issues: direct harm in the form of hitting; indirect harm stemming from whether to return money that the story protagonist sees someone
lose; and helping. The following discussion presents a portion of the findings that pertain to the relations between the personal and moral decision-making. The goal of the study was to examine age-related changes in the coordination of elements in moral situations of varying complexity. The complexity stemmed from two sources. First, as will be explained below, the three types of focal issues varied in their moral salience. Second, the contexts depicted in the study scenarios varied in complexity in terms of the form of conflict posed, and the relationship between the protagonist and the persons depicted in moral situations. We had two very general hypotheses. One was that age would be associated with the ways in which our subjects coordinated elements depicted in the story scenarios. The second was that the complexity of the issue and the context would impact the form of moral reasoning subjects would employ, and the likelihood that individuals would render judgments in the moral direction.

In the research design, each of the three basic situations of harm or helping was presented within three conditions. In the unconflicted situations, the protagonist had to make a moral decision without any obvious personal needs or the needs of any third party coming into play. There were two conflict conditions. In the conflicted-self condition, the story protagonist has personal needs or wants that are in conflict with causing harm or providing help to another person. In the conflicted-other condition, the moral choice of whether to cause harm or help someone is in conflict with the needs of a third party. Finally, these basic situations were varied in terms of the characteristics of the person who is the object of the moral decision: a generic other, a vulnerable other, or an antagonistic other. The other child was described simply as a “girl” or “boy,” or as someone who had antagonized the child the previous day by teasing and making fun of him/her, or as a vulnerable child who falls or drops money because of a handicapping condition or engages in hitting because of an inability to control emotions. These characteristics of the other were intended to impact the degree of empathy for the other child in the moral conflict situations. Participants in the study were asked to make two kinds of judgments: (a) whether the act was right or wrong, and (b) whether the protagonist in the scenario would have a right to engage in the action if that is what s/he chose to do. This second question was intended as a probe of the participant’s view of the decision as something that was a matter of personal choice. Participants in the study were early elementary grades (7 to 8 years old), middle elementary grades (10 to 11 years old), middle school (13 to 14 years old), and high school (16 to 17 years old). Children were heterogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity and were drawn from urban and suburban settings in two regions of the United States.

Preliminary Findings

This is a complex study, and this section will focus upon two of the findings emerging from this research. The first is that as we had anticipated there are general age-related changes in moral reasoning that take place over the 9-year age span investigated. Each pattern reflects a shift in the ways that individuals address the various (sometimes competing) elements of a given moral situation. The pattern we have labeled simple/straightforward is one in which evaluation of the right or wrong of an action is based on the most salient moral elements of harm or welfare presented in the situation. The decisions made using this pattern appear nonwavering and unambiguous. Individuals may recognize or mention other elements, or
can recognize other elements if they are brought to the person’s attention. However, these elements are not incorporated into the moral decision process. Reasoning we have dubbed uncoordinated/conflicted is characterized by attention to competing elements of a moral situation and an appreciation of moral ambiguity, but without resolution or evidence of coordinating the moral and nonmoral concerns in a systematic, generalized, and consistent way. This reasoning is manifested by inconsistency and ambivalence that sometimes results in the altering of a moral principle to fit the situation, or a reading of moral ambiguity, as allowing for selection of an action that fits the needs and desires of the actor. In contrast, coordinated reasoning, which is the third form that emerged from our data, is characterized by consideration and weighing of multiple (moral and nonmoral) aspects or concerns with a clear resolution. Individuals who employ coordinated reasoning will often demonstrate an awareness of moral ambiguity and the arguments that can be made for acting in self-interest in such situations. However, they engage in reasoning that leads to resolution of moral ambiguity and the integration of nonmoral concerns in a consistent and systematic way. As will be discussed below, these patterns of reasoning are strongly associated with moral decision making with the straightforward and coordinated forms generally associated with decisions that prioritize morality, and with the uncoordinated/conflicted pattern resulting in less consistency in the direction of moral choice.

The second basic finding is that the expression of the forms of reasoning uncovered in this research is impacted by context. Situations in which the moral aspect of a situation was highly salient, such as unprovoked hitting, did not generate or seem to require moral reasoning beyond the most basic form evidenced by our youngest participants. Analyses of the elements incorporated in making judgments about unprovoked hitting, for example, revealed a preponderance of reasons across ages that focused upon moral domain considerations of welfare and fairness. More complex moral situations tended to elicit more complex forms of moral reasoning. As will be discussed below, situations such as those involving indirect harm (whether or not to return money), where the moral elements are less apparent, and contexts in which the needs of the primary actors in the scenario are in conflict tended to elicit more complex forms of moral reasoning.

Illustrative Examples: Indirect Stealing (Returning the Money) and Helping

What follows is a sampling of the findings that illustrate the general developmental patterns obtained in our results. In keeping with the focus of this chapter, the discussion on the intersection between the personal and the moral, the focus will be upon the outcomes from the indirect stealing (returning the money) and helping scenarios. In the situation we refer to as indirect stealing, a child is described as boarding an empty bus. Soon afterward a second person boards the bus and drops $10 while reaching for the money to pay the bus fare. Neither the driver nor the passenger is aware of the $10 bill on the floor. The protagonist has to decide whether to tell the passenger that s/he dropped the money or keep silent and pick up the bill and keep it. If we examine this situation in comparison with hitting and hurting someone, we can see that the two situations contain different elements with respect to their moral implications. In the case of hitting, the harm is a direct consequence of the action. The moral evaluation would involve drawing inferences and conclusions directly from experiences surrounding the harm caused by the act.
The Personal and the Moral

the case of not returning the money, the harm can be viewed as both indirect, and as involving a number of potentially complicating factors. Among these are the following considerations. Theft is involved whenever one person knowingly acquires the property of another without the other person’s permission. A case of direct theft would be to place your hand in someone else’s pocket and take money from it. In this case, the protagonist is aware that the $10 bill that was dropped was the property of the person who dropped it. The protagonist is also aware that the person who dropped the money has not given permission for anyone else to take it and keep it. So, not to tell the person who dropped the money and to pick it up and keep it is a case of theft. On the other hand, the protagonist did not actively cause the money to fall from the other person’s pocket. In addition, if the protagonist had not been on the scene, and the protagonist would therefore not have seen that the other child dropped the $10 bill; it would have been lost. Moreover, if the protagonist had been walking along a street and had seen a $10 bill, he would have been within his rights to keep it. Thus, given the nature of this situation, there is some potential for moral ambiguity that does not exist in the case of direct theft.

The helping scenarios described a child who witnesses another child slip and fall and apparently become injured. The injured child appears to be in pain and asks the story protagonist to go to the child’s house a few blocks away and alert the child’s parents to get help. In the helping scenarios as in the indirect stealing scenario, the actor’s own actions did not cause the harm or potential loss to the other child. Thus, whether to help or not has an element of personal choice that is not evident in the moral requirement to not engage in unprovoked hitting and hurting of someone else. In Western philosophy (Kant, 1783/1959), this element of choice is what makes helping an imperfect moral duty. There is some evidence that cultural factors impact the tendencies of individuals to help in situations of relatively low need with individuals from the West more likely to refer to personal choice (Miller, Das, & Chakravarthy, 2011; Miller & Bland, this volume). In our study we varied the needs of both the protagonist and the child who needs assistance.

Judgments of Right/Wrong

Judgments of whether it would be right or wrong to keep the money that was dropped did not differ by age for the situations that involved the person who dropped the money described as a generic child or a child who dropped the money due to a disability. Between 83% and 100% of the participants said that it would be wrong to keep the money. Participants were somewhat more willing across ages to keep the money dropped by someone who had teased them in the past. Thus, for the simple moral evaluation of right/wrong, the moral aspects of the situation were salient for participants across ages.

Findings for judgments of right/wrong in the helping situations, however, did vary by age. Early adolescent participants (ages 13–14) were significantly less likely to say that it would be wrong not to help the generic or vulnerable child than were younger and older participants. This was especially the case in situations posing a conflict between the needs of the protagonist or someone close to the protagonist, and the needs of the child seeking help. The primary justification employed in judgments that it was all right not to help was personal choice. Judgments that it would be wrong not to help focused upon moral elements of human welfare and fairness.
Judgments of Having a Right to Engage in the Act

Judgments of whether an act is right or wrong reveal part of an individual’s moral thinking. However, a second aspect of moral deliberation is whether an actor is bound by that judgment, or whether one would have a right to engage in the nonmoral act if that was the person’s decision. This judgment may be seen as an indication of whether the moral judgment of wrongness carries with it a perceived obligation to act in accordance with that evaluation. Our findings with respect to whether or not one would have a right to keep the money or not help someone in need were quite different from the outcomes with regard to unprovoked harm, where nearly all of the participants across ages judged that one would not have a right to engage the action. What we found was an age-related pattern in moral decision making in which the youngest children and older adolescent participants were more likely to argue that one would not have a right, while the older children and early adolescents in particular were more likely to state that one would have a right to engage in the nonmoral action if that was the person’s choice. Figure 25.1 presents the findings for the percentages of participants at each age who argued that one would have a right to keep the money, and that one would have an obligation to help.

The finding that children in early adolescence are more willing to endorse the idea that one has a right not to help is consistent with the outcomes reported in a recent study investigating predictions that children and adolescents made regarding the decisions that actors would make in potential prosocial situations (Makariev & Lagattuta, in press). Interpreting these developmental findings, however, requires an analysis of the reasoning behind these judgments. That will be taken up below. It should be pointed out...
that the observed age-related patterns in judgments about the right to engage in these actions does not reflect a decontextualized “stage” of instrumentalist moral thinking such as depicted by Kohlberg’s (1984) second stage of moral reasoning. For one thing, these findings regarding helping and returning the money are at odds with judgments made about unprovoked harm. In addition the tendencies of 10- to 14-year-old participants to agree with the notion that one would have a “right” not to help or to keep the money was diminished when the other person was depicted as handicapped or otherwise vulnerable. In the case of the vulnerable other, the moral salience of the situation was heightened, and the moral elements of welfare and fairness incorporated in the moral judgments were predominant.

**Age-Related Patterns of Moral Reasoning**

The pattern we observed with respect to judgments about right/wrong for the helping situations, and the judgments about the right to engage in actions for both helping and returning the money were accompanied by age-related changes in the reasoning employed to generate those decisions. Figure 25.2 presents the age-related changes in moral reasoning for the indirect stealing (returning the money) scenario.

As can be seen in the figure, the youngest children (8 years old) in our study employed simple straightforward reasoning that focused upon the salient moral issues in the scenarios. Their judgments were dominated by considerations of harm and welfare and categorical statements that keeping the money would be wrong. These young children also
never referred to the potential ambiguities that might arise when someone drops money on the ground in a public area. Nearly half of the 8- and 10-year-old participants referred to the fact that the money belonged to the person who dropped it as part of their arguments as to why the protagonist would not have a right to keep the money. The following excerpts from an 8-year-old boy and girl nicely illustrate this early “straightforward” form of reasoning.

Would it be wrong or all right for (protagonist) to keep the money instead of giving it back to the other girl/boy?

GIRL: No, because it’s someone else’s $10 bill, she shouldn’t keep it because it’s not hers.

BOY: He’s stealing, and you don’t want to, it’s not good to steal.

As children got older and especially in early adolescence (13 years old), their judgments began to incorporate more contextual elements with an increasing amount of situational ambiguity. As can be seen in Figure 25.2, the dominant form of reasoning among 13-year olds was more complex uncoordinated moral thinking. Over half of the 13-year-old participants who judged that the actor would have a right to keep the money included arguments disputing the continued ownership of the money once it had been dropped. In addition, the 13-year olds were more likely to include considerations of personal choice and free will than were the younger children. However, these young adolescents were not able to coordinate the disparate elements of their arguments with the moral considerations these same participants brought into their decision making. The reasoning of these participants is illustrated in the following excerpts.

GIRL: . . . he’s not doing anything wrong. He’s not necessarily doing something wrong, but the right thing to do would be to give it back, but he’s not necessarily, he doesn’t necessarily have any wrongdoing.

BOY: He’s got every right to keep the ten dollars, like I said, because it’s in nowhere land. And it’s his, he found it. It’s not in the kid’s house or anything.

What can be seen in the above excerpts and especially in the statements from the 13-year-old girl is the inconsistency and ambivalence characteristic of this form of moral thinking. By the age of 16 to 17 years (see Figure 25.2), the majority of adolescents in the study had resolved the ambiguity of the situation as entailing a form of theft. The reasoning of these older adolescent participants also displayed an increased capacity to coordinate the moral and nonmoral elements in rendering their decisions. This form of moral reasoning is displayed in the following excerpt. Worth noting in the statements of this 17-year old is the recognition of the arguments contained in the statements we received from the younger participants, as in the 13-year olds quoted above.

GIRL: Well, in reality, would it be all right or not all right? You should always give the money back. But, I can understand the thought process for not giving the money back. Well in reality, if something, I don’t know how to say that, if someone loses money, it’s theirs and if you know that, she should give it back. But, if you just saw then dollars on the street and you have no idea who it belongs to, keep it, but if
you know who it belongs to, it's your duty to give it back. But I can understand the thought process.

Patterns of Moral Reasoning, Rights, and the Personal

The developmental patterns we observed for the returning-the-money situation were mirrored in the outcomes about helping. In this case, the arguments advanced by the 8-year olds centered around the needs of the fallen child. The older participants, however, attempted to address those needs as well as the desires and needs of the protagonist. The questions about whether one would have a right not to help brought in considerations of the personal and notions of free will. A position developed early in this chapter is that claims to a personal domain are integral to the construction of moral concepts about rights (Nucci, 1996, 2001). Any notion of rights, however, is also delimited by moral considerations regarding the rights and welfare of others (Dworkin, 1978; Helwig, 2006; Helwig et al., this volume; Nucci, 2000). The references to rights made by the adolescents in our study, who also exhibited uncoordinated moral reasoning, appeared to conflate an agent's capacity to elect to act on a personal choice with the right to engage in that action. Older adolescents who displayed coordinated moral thinking were cognizant of such arguments, but they incorporated their notions of the personal and free will with the considerations of welfare and fairness that stemmed from the needs to help the fallen child. We saw similar movement in the returning-the-money scenario from the notion that the ambiguity in ownership meant that one had a right to exercise freedom of choice and keep the money to a coordinated refutation of that perspective on the grounds that one had no right to keep money that clearly belonged to someone else.

Preliminary Conclusions From Research on Moral Development

The findings from this study sustain a basic premise of social cognitive domain theory that development is associated with shifts in the capacity to coordinate moral and nonmoral elements of social situations. This expanded capacity for incorporating facets of moral situations does not, however, present a straightforward picture of moral development as linear moral “progress” toward shared answers to moral situations. Instead, moral growth includes periods of transition in which the expanded capacity to consider aspects of moral situations leads to variations in the application of moral criteria. The findings regarding judgments about whether one has a right to engage in a nonmoral choice suggests that coordinating the personal with morality is particularly impacted in complex moral contexts and in periods of developmental transition. Older adolescents in this study seemed better able than their younger counterparts to coordinate the disparate elements of conflict situations in ways that afforded a moral resolution while acknowledging competing nonmoral interests. This coordination includes the clarification or resolution of the distinction between one's capacity and right to choice, with the constraints upon individual action that comes with moral obligation. Thus, at a superficial level, the choices made by older adolescents and young children appear to be more consistent with what is morally right. These developmental factors, however, do not comprise a stage of moral decision making in which a particular form of moral reasoning imposes itself upon social contexts.
We saw no evidence of a “stage” of moral reasoning dominated by self-interest or a subordination of morality to the personal. The findings from this research are also inconsistent with a view of moral growth in which considerations of self-interest and morality become resolved as a function of developmental stage.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The focus of this chapter has been upon the role of the personal in social development, and the connections between the personal and morality. The cumulative research evidence supports the basic propositions that individuals construct a conceptual framework to account for their claims to a zone of personal choice and privacy. These concepts about the personal emerge in early childhood and are associated with patterns of social interaction and discourse that are distinct from those associated with social convention and morality. One aspect of those social interactions is that children provide resistance to parental regulation over areas that are concordant with the personal (Nucci & Weber, 1995), and that such resistance accounts for much of the dynamics associated with normative adolescent–parent conflict in adolescence (Smetana, 2011). Moreover, the justifications that individuals provide for their claims to the personal support the proposition that the personal is integral to the establishment of selfhood, individuality, and autonomy (Nucci, 1996, 2001). Evidence that the personal as integral to the self-system is further supported by findings from Western and non-Western societies that parental overcontrol of the personal areas of adolescents is associated with psychological symptoms of depression and anxiety (Helwig et al., 2009; Hasebe et al., 2004; Nucci et al., 2012). Future research on the personal would build from these findings to expand our understanding of normative emergence of the personal in family settings. It would also continue to forge links with theory of mind researchers investigating the connections between the personal, concepts of self, and other aspects of the psychological domain (Lagattuta et al., 2010).

The contribution of the personal to morality and moral development comes from the role that appeals to the personal have for the construction of rights as freedoms (Nucci, 1996; see Helwig et al., this volume), and the interaction between personal and moral considerations in social contexts. The recent findings on age-related changes in the intersection of the personal and moral described in this chapter are concordant with domain theory assumptions that moral development reflects an increased capacity to coordinate elements in context (Smetana & Turiel, 2003). These findings raise a number of interesting questions for further research. Among them are whether the observed shifts in the consideration of moral and personal elements described in this chapter reflect other, more general aspects of cognitive processing such as executive function, which are also undergoing development during these same ages (Richardson, Mulvey, & Kilien, 2012).

These findings also point toward the importance of looking at context as well as development in our understandings of morality. Our findings exploring the personal and moral do not support the notion of a generalized sequence of stages of moral reasoning that are applied in the same way across contexts (Nucci & Turiel, 2007, in progress). Our sample of early adolescents, for example, varied their emphasis on moral and personal considerations as a function of the salience of each element within a given situation. Individual subjects who appeared to prioritize personal choice and rights in one context prioritized morality
in another. These findings are consistent with other work indicating that individuals shift the weight they give to moral and personal considerations in context (Turiel, Mensing, & Perkins, 2009). An excellent example is the findings reported by Killen and colleagues (Killen, Sinno, & Margie, 2007) demonstrating that decisions of whether or not to include someone in group activities reflect different weightings given to fairness, group functioning, and individual preferences.

Moreover, the balancing act between personal and moral considerations is not resolved once and for all in middle adolescence. What this all suggests is that future work on the interface between the moral and personal will need to include analyses of context, culture (see J. G. Miller et al., this volume), and self (see Nucci, 2004, for a discussion), along with development. With respect to culture, we are at an important turning point where old arguments about whether the personal is limited to Western societies have been resolved. The more interesting work lies still ahead of us, in which the methodologies of cultural anthropology, cultural psychology, and domain theory are combined in a genuinely interdisciplinary effort to understand the emergence of the personal. Such interdisciplinary work would move us toward a more comprehensive understanding of the development of self, morality, and rights.

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