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Early Adolescence and Prosocial/Moral Behavior II: The Role of Social and Contextual Influences

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This is the second installment of the special issue on prosocial and moral development in early adolescence. This issue focuses on social and contextual processes in young adolescents' prosocial and moral behaviors. In this introductory article, a brief review of the research on parents or family, peers, school environment, culture, and nationality as correlates of prosocial and moral development was presented. The research indicates that the social context plays an important role in prosocial and moral development. However, research on the social and contextual correlates of prosocial and moral development in early adolescence is at an embryonic stage. Research is needed that integrates analyses of individual and social contextual processes to fully understand prosocial and moral development. Moreover, more sophisticated design and assessment procedures and research with racially or ethnically diverse samples are needed. It is hoped that researchers focus more attention on the positive processes and behaviors associated with the various social contextual transitions in early adolescence.

As many researchers have noted, early adolescence is a period of time when multiple transitions occur (Simmons, Burgeson, & Reef, 1988; Wigfield, Ec-

cles, & Pintrich, 1996). Few developmental periods are characterized by so many changes at so many differing levels as is early adolescence. With these rapid and multiple changes comes a heightened potential both for positive and negative outcomes. Much attention has been given to the problematic outcomes of adolescence (e.g., Ketterlinus & Lamb, 1994; Pipher, 1994); however, considerably less attention has been devoted to the positive changes that might occur during that age period. In the first issue, empirical evidence that there are general increases in prosocial tendencies as children get older was presented (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999). Furthermore, those tendencies were greater during early and late adolescence than they were during childhood. Moreover, evidence regarding the individual difference correlates of prosocial behaviors of early adolescence was presented in several manuscripts from that issue.

The second issue presents empirical evidence regarding the social and contextual processes associated with prosocial and moral behaviors of young adolescents. To ensure that readers are familiar with the development of prosocial and moral behaviors, the present article is a relatively succinct overview of the literature on the social and contextual correlates of prosocial and moral development in early adolescence. Although there is growing recognition that comprehensive models of prosocial and moral development will require the integration of individual and social contextual influences of these behaviors (Carlo, Eisenberg, Troyer, Switzer, & Speer, 1991; Carlo, Roesch, & Melby, 1998; Knight, Johnson, Carlo, & Eisenberg, 1994), space restrictions limit our ability to be comprehensive. However, it is hoped that the two installments of this special issue of the Journal of Early Adolescence will spur more research and thinking about boys' and girls' tendencies to care for, be concerned about, help, share, and defend others during this transition from childhood to adolescence.

Social and Contextual Processes Related to Changes in Prosocial Behavior During Early Adolescence

The family. Traditionally, adolescence has been viewed as a period of growing autonomy from the family, in which the influence of the peer group gradually usurps the influence of parents, mostly as the result of intergenerational conflict over fundamental values, norms, and behaviors (Coleman, 1961). Research has not supported the idea that parents and adolescents engage in conflict over such issues (Grotevant, 1998). At the same time, however, researchers also have suggested that the parent-child relationship undergoes a period of realignment in early adolescence, accompanied by a

temporary increase in parent-adolescent distance and conflict over every-day lifestyle issues (see Collins & Russell, 1991; Steinberg, 1988). Collins (1997) suggested that the interactions between parents and adolescents are mediated by each individual's expectations about the behavior of the other and that parent-adolescent conflict (especially in early adolescence) arises as the result of discrepancies between actual and expected behavior. These discrepancies can be created by the adolescent's rapid maturational changes and new social opportunities and ultimately encourage the renegotiation of both perceptions and family relationships.

The fact that parent-child relationships experience slight perturbations in early adolescence raises some interesting questions about the influence of parents during this time on an adolescent's prosocial and moral development. For example, does the influence of parents on a child's moral development wane as the result of this increase in conflict and perhaps as a result of the inconsistent parenting practices that result from the realignment of parent-child relationships? Alternatively, does this temporary increase in conflict during early adolescence serve to promote perspective taking in the Piagetian sense and thus foster the child's development? Unfortunately, research into these issues has been lacking. Regardless, it seems likely that parents continue to play a role in moral and prosocial development throughout adolescence, even if the influence of peers on moral development increases during this time.

Theorists have speculated that parents influence a child's moral and prosocial development in many ways; these include providing information about desirable ways to behave, direct modeling of prosocial behavior, encouraging and directing appropriate behavior, punishing inappropriate behavior, and creating an affective climate that encourages (or discourages) empathy development (Eisenberg & Murphy, 1995). The limited evidence available on prosocial and moral development in adolescence has indicated that prosocial behaviors are fostered by supportive parenting, combined with parental practices and discipline techniques (e.g., parental reasoning inductions). These practices and styles help to focus the adolescent's behavior on the feelings of others and to provide behavioral models of prosocial behavior (Carlo, Raffaelli, Laible, & Meyer, in press; Krevins & Gibbs, 1996; Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 1998; see Eberly & Montemayor, 1999 [this issue]). Furthermore, social responsibility and prosocial behavior have been linked with authoritative and democratic parenting styles (Baumrind, 1987; see Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999 [this issue]; Pratt, Arnold, Pratt, & Diessner, 1999 [this issue]), although the pattern of relations is sometimes weak (e.g., Baumrind, 1991) and parenting has been found to interact with individual characteristics of the adolescent (Carlo, Roesch et al., 1998).

Siblings also might influence an adolescent's prosocial and moral development, although virtually no research exists on this topic (but see Tucker, Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter, 1999 [this issue]). Lamb (1982) has suggested,

> siblings set and maintain standards, provide models to emulate and advice to consider, enact complementary roles in relation to one another, through which both develop and practice social-interactional skills, and serve as confidants and sources of nonjudgmental social support in times of emotional stress. (p. 6)

Furthermore, Dunn and Munn (1986) have argued that the conflict, teasing, and manipulation that occur among early sibling relationships might serve as a context in which social understanding is fostered and developed. The idea that facets unique to sibling relationships foster perspective taking, social understanding, and moral development (across the life span) is provocative and represents a rich area for further research.

In summary, the role of the family on an early adolescent's prosocial and moral development is unclear and remains a virtually unexplored area. For example, it is not clear whether particular parenting techniques foster prosocial behavior or whether children who are high in prosocial behavior are easier to discipline and therefore lead to parents using more inductive, less power-assertive discipline strategies. It seems likely that the influence of the family in an adolescent's socialization is bi-directional. Newer models of socialization have redefined traditional conceptualizations of socialization to incorporate the mutual influences of parents and children on each other (e.g., Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997) and hopefully, those models will inspire a new generation of research on the role of the family in adolescent socialization.

Peer influences. The establishment of a peer network is an important part of early adolescence (Larson & Richards, 1991). In junior high (and middle schools), adolescents begin to select peers by interest rather than mere convenience (Csikszenthmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Peers seem to play an important role in the development of adolescent self-esteem (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Furthermore, adolescents who have stable friendships are likely to have better grades and participate in extracurricular activities, and less likely to participate in problematic behaviors (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). However, the establishment of a peer network depends on the types of friendships that adolescents form.

The influences that are present in the peer network are an important part of adolescent prosocial development, as peer reinforcement has been shown to be associated with self-esteem (Simmons & Blyth, 1987) and moral de-

velopment (Furman & Masters, 1980; see Schonert-Reichl, 1999 [this issue]). When prosocial behaviors are displayed toward peers, they are likely to respond in a prosocial manner and might engage in cycles of prosocial exchanges (Bukowski & Sippola, 1996; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). This cycle is more likely to occur between peers than between adolescents and adults because of the more equal social status between adolescent peers than between adolescents and adults. These findings suggest that peer interactions are unique from adult-adolescent interactions and are important in adolescent development. Moreover, those friendly peer interactions form the basis for adolescent morality (Bukowski & Sippola, 1996).

The magnitude of positive and negative peer influences on adolescent behavior has been a topic of debate in the literature (Ma, Shek, Cheung, & Lee, 1996; Vitaro, Tremblay, Kerr, Pagani, & Bukowski, 1997). Two theoretical models that attempt to account for the extent to which peers influence behaviors include the Peer Influence Model and the Individual Characteristics Model (Vitaro et al., 1997). According to the Peer Influence Model, deviant peer groups influence adolescents to be involved with deviant behaviors. The Individual Characteristics Model does not acknowledge the role of peer influence on adolescent behaviors. That model assumes that adolescents involved in delinquent behaviors befriend deviant peer groups. Although methodological limitations often inhibit researchers from drawing confident causal inferences about the relations of peer influence and adolescent behavior, the contributions of both models are recognized in the literature.

Chen (1997) conducted a national longitudinal study in an attempt to explain positive and negative peer influences on adolescents. Adolescents were divided into groups of those valuing friends who emphasized scholastics, social activities, or delinquent activities. The research findings indicated that adolescents who valued friends that cared about school did better in school. In contrast, adolescents who valued friends that were considered delinquent were more likely to be truant.

Although the degree to which friends and peers directly influence young adolescents' prosocial development is unclear, adolescents who have friends who are uninvolved in deviant behaviors also are likely to be uninvolved in deviant behaviors (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). The literature has indicated that adolescents who have friends who are uninvolved in deviant behaviors also are more likely to excel in school and less likely to drop out. Those results are consistent with the notion that adolescents with positive peer groups are more likely to obtain an education and training for a career, and be successful throughout high school and into adulthood. Because adolescents with

deviant peer groups are at risk for dropping out of school and delinquent be-
haviors, it is probable that those adolescents are less likely to obtain desirable
employment of further education. These implications highlight the serious-
ness of peer influence on the developing adolescent's prosocial (and antiso-
cial) behaviors.

Schooling. Eccles and Midgley (1989) noted that junior high school students
have an especially difficult time making the transition to new scholastic en-
vironments because many of those environments are not appropriate devel-
opmentally and do not foster positive transitions. Those theorists also have
posited the conditions that might promote prosocial behaviors and decrease
the likelihood of a poor transition (e.g., increased individual student-teacher
contact) by reducing the stress associated with such transitions. Although lit-
tle direct empirical evidence is available, the impact of school transitions and
the aspects of schooling that might affect young adolescents' prosocial and
moral development will be discussed.

Prosocial development might be affected by the size of the school because
size is a factor in determining how often students see familiar faces. Lack
of familiarity might detrimentally affect prosocial behavior by increasing the
anonymity of students. There is some evidence that prosocial behavior be-
tween individuals is less likely to occur when the individuals are not familiar
with one another (see Eisenberg, 1986). When there are large student enroll-
ments, faculty and staff might not be well acquainted with the children, and
student supervision suffers. Furthermore, because students in large schools
might not know many of their peers, they might feel disconnected or alone in
a large school. That feeling of disconnectedness might decrease empathy and
perspective taking among peers and, in turn, might decrease prosocial behav-
iors among peers.

Junior high (and middle school) also marks the first time in school when
the majority of students are expected to change classrooms throughout the
day. Simmons, Carlton-Ford, and Blyth (1987) identified this as departmen-
talization. Because classes are organized departmentally, students have dif-
ferent teachers for each academic subject, which reduces the amount of time
students spend with each instructor. This also often leads to different peers in
each classroom. In this system, students have less of an opportunity to form
close bonds with each teacher and with other peers. The lack of opportuni-
ties to form close bonds with teachers and students might lead to decreases in
pro-social tendencies.

Enrollment size might be an important factor in determining the best ed-
ucational infrastructure for the school. Different class schedules for differ-
ing schools based on enrollment size might be developed to enhance pro-

social tendencies. For example, individual schedules for students in small schools might foster prosocial development because those students might already know their peers and are likely to be involved actively with extracurricular activities (e.g., team sports, school clubs). Individualized schedules for students in small schools in which all peers know each other might foster autonomy. In contrast, students from larger schools might not know the majority of their peers and thus could benefit from having the same schedule as a group of students. This would enable students in large schools to form a small network of close friendships. Thus, schools can enhance opportunities for students in those networks to get involved with extracurricular activities and group activities by providing the same network of classmates throughout the school day.

Due to the number of changes that students face during the transition from elementary school to junior high and middle school and the demands placed on the teachers in those middle grades, it is not surprising that a sizable number of young adolescents have difficulty with this transition. Teachers spend more time monitoring behavior and less time teaching curriculum in middle level grades as compared to elementary school grades, which might make it more difficult to teach new academic concepts (Wigfield et al., 1996). If teachers spend more time monitoring students, many students might become unmotivated, easily distracted, and perform lower in school subjects. The decreases in academic performance and involvement by the students might undermine prosocial and moral development.

Challenging adolescents to higher levels of academic performance and encouraging connectedness and involvement among students is important because such challenges can foster prosocial and moral development. As cognitive developmental theorists (e.g., Eisenberg, 1986) have pointed out, role-taking opportunities (i.e., exposure to differing viewpoints) are primary venues for moral development, and schools are one medium for gaining access to differing viewpoints. Furthermore, students can be taught to work in groups cooperatively and assist each other in academic subjects. These processes can enhance learning and prosocial tendencies among peers. That prosocial climate is not as likely to occur if the curriculum is not optimally demanding or academically engaging (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

Culture, nationality, and ethnicity. Culture can be defined as a perceived similarity in beliefs, norms, and experiences among individuals that distinguishes those individuals from other groups of individuals (Gardiner, Mutter, & Kosmitzki, 1998). The study of culture and ethnicity is important in understanding the climate of the early adolescent and its impact on prosocial and moral development. As several theorists have noted (e.g., Bronfenbrenner,

1979; Whiting & Edwards, 1988), studies of culture complement and extend developmental research and theory—it is an integral and important aspect of the social context of development.

In recent years, there have been many debates on whether morality is universal across cultures. Cultural psychologists (e.g., Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987) have posited that morality is a social construct shaped by cultural norms that might differ across cultures, whereas structural psychologists (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Turiel, 1998) argue that moral structures, domains, and processes are universal across cultures. Although those arguments are beyond the scope of this review, the debate has placed culture on center stage in the recent research on moral development.

Early psychological research of cultural variations in prosocial and moral behaviors was concerned with cross-national studies of cooperative and competitive behaviors. Based on socialization theories and anthropological observations, theorists hypothesized that certain cultures emphasize specific moral values and behaviors. As a result of socialization and cognitive development processes (Knight, Bernal, & Carlo, 1995), the values and behaviors deemed most important for that society would be expected to have been acquired by early adolescence, as the child prepares for the newfound opportunities afforded by the society. Thus, cross-national variations in prosocial and moral behaviors would be expected to be prominent by early adolescence.

Research on cooperative, prosocial, and moral behaviors has yielded nationality differences. For example, Mexicans prefer cooperative social behaviors to a greater extent than do European Americans (Knight et al., 1995). Stevenson (1991) noted that Chinese and Japanese families espouse helping around the house, helping classroom peers, and doing good for their society. In one study with older adolescents (Ma, 1989), Chinese adolescents reportedly were more willing to risk their lives to save another, more oriented toward human sentiments, and more oriented toward abiding the laws than were adolescents from England. Ma (1989) proposed that these findings were consistent with the familial emphases of human sentiment, collectivism, group solidarity, and obedience (authoritarian style) of Chinese children and adolescents.

In a review of the prohibition-oriented moral-reasoning literature across 45 studies, Snarey (1985) reported significant cultural variations in the (non) existence of higher stages of moral reasoning, particularly when comparing Westernized-industrialized and non-Westernized–nonindustrialized societies. Carlo, Koller, Eisenberg, Da Silva, and Frohlich (1996) reported that Brazilian children and adolescents preferred empathic and internalized modes of prosocial moral reasoning less than did European American children and ad-

olescents; furthermore, in late adolescence, European Americans preferred approval-oriented prosocial moral reasoning more than did Brazilians (Carlo, Roesch, & Koller, in press). Other researchers (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993) showed that Brazilian adolescents, as compared to European American adolescents, judged harmless, offensive actions as moral violations. Boehnke, Silbereisen, Eisenberg, Reykowski, and Palmonari (1989) found that Italian and German adolescents reported differing motives for pro-social behaviors. Skoe et al. (1999 [this issue]) reported nationality differences in care-oriented moral reasoning between Canadians and Norwegian adolescents.

Of particular interest to psychologists is whether models of prosocial and moral behavior are cross-culturally equivalent. Consistent with prior research conducted with European Americans, research conducted with Brazilian adolescents indicated that higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning were associated positively with prosocial behaviors (Carlo et al., 1996). Furthermore, institutionalized Brazilian adolescents (i.e., delinquents and orphans) scored lower on prosocial moral reasoning than low socioeconomic status, noninstitutionalized Brazilian adolescents (Carlo, Koller, & Eisenberg, 1998). More research is needed to examine these and other theoretically derived relations in other cultures.

Studies of prosocial and moral behaviors in ethnic minority groups from the United States have been few. Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) and Steward and Steward (1973) pointed out that parents of Mexican descent attempt to instill a sense of collectivism and cooperation in their children. Williams (1991) found that high-income Mexican American families valued more what others did to help them than did high-income European American families. Consistent with these findings, a number of researchers (see Knight et al., 1995, for a review) have shown that Mexican American children and adolescents prefer cooperative to competitive behaviors more than do European American children and adolescents.

In summary, theorists and researchers suggest that cultural norms and experiences substantially affect the types and frequency of prosocial and moral motives and behaviors in adolescence. Of course, adolescence is a culturally defined term and the ways that different cultures, view, treat, and react to this developmental transition also can contribute to cultural differences in young adolescents' prosocial and moral development. It is likely that prosocial and moral behaviors vary among different cultures or ethnic groups, not only with regard to frequency of specific behaviors but also with regard to motives that underlie those behaviors. As Staub (1978) pointed out, there are at least three classes of motives for prosocial behaviors: self-gain and approval, internalized values (such as norms of responsibility, equity, or maintaining social or-

der), and empathy. Socialization practices and cultural environments might emphasize or promote motives deemed particularly important to specific cultures (see Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Examination of a wider array of cultures with more sophisticated research designs (e.g., longitudinal studies and multivariate approaches) and culturally valid measures will help to illuminate the role of culture and ethnicity on prosocial and moral development.

CONCLUSIONS

Early adolescence is a time in which major biological, psychological, and social contextual changes occur. Whereas some young adolescents flourish during this transition period, other adolescents find the transitions difficult. For some young adolescents, this transition period includes negative outcomes such as declining motivation for academic achievement (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Wigfield et al., 1996), declining grades (Simmons & Blyth, 1987), increased dropout and truancy rates (Rosenbaum, 1976), and decreased self-esteem (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). For other young adolescents, this transition period includes positive outcomes such as increased academic performance and motivation (Eccles & Midgley, 1989), increases in socio-cognitive skills (Carlo, Eisenberg, & Knight, 1992), and increased levels of prosocial tendencies (Eisenberg, 1986). The issue for future researchers is to identify the factors that promote the positive outcomes and mitigate the negative outcomes in adolescence.

The effects of the transition into early adolescence is magnified because a number of changes might occur simultaneously (i.e., puberty, changing schools, beginning to date, and familial changes such as divorce, new siblings, or remarriage). For example, it has been found that as the number of life transitions increases, grades and participation in extracurricular activities decrease for both boys and girls, and self-esteem decreases for girls (Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Simmons et al., 1988). Moreover, evidence suggests that the transitions of early adolescence are associated with negative motivational and behavioral characteristics (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Although these changes are not extreme for most adolescents, these data suggest that young adolescents' prosocial and moral development might be hindered when multiple changes occur during adolescent transitions. Clearly, there is a need to integrate individual and social context processes to fully understand prosocial and moral development during early adolescence.

The research on the social and contextual influences of prosocial and moral development in early adolescence is in a state of flux. Although a number of researchers have shown the importance of family and peer influences on

these behaviors, less is known about the influence of ethnicity, culture, religion, the media (including access to magazines, music, television, and the Internet), and schooling. One notable context that is likely to affect prosocial and moral development in adolescence is the growing opportunities to engage in youth organizations and extracurricular activities. Moreover, cross-national studies have been conducted in surprisingly few countries, and studies of ethnicity have been conducted in few ethnic groups and mostly with ethnic groups within the United States. Given the recent and expected demographic trends of ethnic and racial minorities, it is surprising to find that virtually no research exists on positive social behaviors in certain Hispanic groups (e.g., Puerto Ricans), Native Americans, and African Americans. As some scientists (MacPhee, Kreutzer, & Fritz, 1994; McCloyd, 1990) have noted, researchers interested in racial and ethnic minorities have tended to focus on deviant and pathological behaviors rather than on prosocial and normative behaviors.

As previously indicated (Fabes et al., 1999), it is hoped that the articles presented in this issue encourage more attention to young adolescents' positive social behavior and to their antecedents and correlates.

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