



CHAPTER 12

Self and Values

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Summary of Topics

Key Themes in Self and Values

- **Nature/Nurture** What roles do nature and nurture play in the development of the self and of values?
- **Sociocultural Influence** How does the socio-cultural context influence the development of the self and of values?
- **Child's Active Role** How does the child play an active role in the development of the self and of values?
- **Continuity/Discontinuity** Is the development of the self and of values continuous or discontinuous?
- **Individual Differences** How prominent are individual differences in the development of the self and of values?
- **Interaction Among Domains** How does the development of the self and of values interact with development in other domains?

Michael had just finished his math assignment when he heard the door slam. Then he heard the loud, angry voice. “Kids today!” his grandfather fumed to no one in particular. “A couple of ’em almost ran me down on the sidewalk. Didn’t bother to apologize. One even yelled, ‘Get out of my way!’ as she chased after her friends. Kids don’t respect anybody, not even themselves—wearing those weird clothes, dying their hair every color you can think of, poking holes in their ears, even their noses! I suppose if I had stopped ’em, they’d have taken a swing at me or even worse. . . .” His voice trailed off to a mutter.

Michael had heard such tirades before: how the world has changed, how young people today do not know right from wrong, how they are just plain troublemakers. Michael also worried about reports on the news: the first-grader who punched his teacher, the large number of sixth-graders who felt cheating was okay, the junior high students suspended for bringing knives and guns to school, and the shootings.

Did his grandfather have a valid point? Just what values do young people have today?

To instill in children a sense of satisfaction with who they are and to recognize the standards of conduct considered acceptable and ethical within their community are among the most important goals of society. We expect children and adults to take pride in their accomplishments, learn to judge right from wrong, and refrain from actions that harm family, friends, or neighbors. Broadly speaking, survival in a social community depends on helping, cooperation, and sharing, behaviors that benefit others. Children display an awareness of self and the consequences of their conduct, both good and bad, early on, but these understandings undergo noticeable changes with development.

Michael’s grandfather believes his generation has witnessed a decline in a positive sense of self and in courtesy and concern for others. Although one might debate whether such a change has actually taken place, the concerns voiced by Michael’s grandfather are not new. Philosophers, theologians, and scientists have argued for decades about whether human nature is good or evil and whether experience serves to channel children’s inborn tendencies in either direction. In this sense, the nature-nurture debate remains embedded in contemporary discussions of the roots of self, moral behavior, and values. In this chapter, we look first at the nature of “self” and how it relates to self-esteem and identity. We consider too how self-regulation and self-control contribute to our development. We then examine several theories of moral development. Finally, we look at how and to what extent society promotes the development of prosocial values.



In touching her nose while looking in the mirror, this eighteen-month-old illustrates one way a toddler tells us something about the knowledge she has about herself. After having a small spot of rouge surreptitiously placed on the tip of her nose, she seems to be indicating by touching her nose that the reflection is of “me.” Before about fifteen to eighteen months of age, children typically do not respond to their reflections in the mirror because they still have a very limited understanding of self.

self Realization of being an independent, unique, stable, and self-reflective entity; the beliefs, knowledge, feelings, and characteristics the individual ascribes to himself or herself.

self-concept Perceptions, conceptions, and values one holds about oneself.

The Concept of Self

“I know how.”
 “Look! See what I did!”
 “I’m smart.”
 “I’m stronger than you!”
 “I’m really good at this!”

These declarations express in no uncertain terms what children believe they can do, what they think they are like, and how they feel about their abilities. The statements reveal the child’s awareness of self. How does this understanding of **self**—as someone who is an independent, unique person, able to reflect on his or her own beliefs and characteristics—develop?

To answer this question, it will be useful to adopt a distinction first offered by William James (1892) more than a century ago. The distinction continues to be every bit as useful today (Harter, 1999). For James, there were two components of self: the “me,” or *objective self*, and the “I,” or *subjective self*. James’s objective, or the “me” aspect of self, is often called *self-concept*. An individual’s self-concept includes an understanding of his or her physical qualities, possessions and status, skills, and psychological characteristics, including personality, beliefs, and value systems.

The “I,” or the subjective component, is made up of several key realizations about the self: (1) I can be an agent of change and can control events in my life (sense of autonomy); (2) my experiences are unique and accessible to no one else in exactly the same way (sense of individuality); (3) my past, present, and future are continuous (sense of stability); and (4) I can reflect on, that is, think about, my self (sense of reflection, or self-consciousness). All contribute to the sense of the subjective “I.”

Self as Object

Self as object, the **self-concept**, consists of the unique set of traits and characteristics an individual holds to be true about himself or herself. The seeds of such awareness already may be sown in the infant’s recognition of how his own body movements take place. For example, the attentional preferences of babies as young as three months suggest that they recognize when left and right position and movements of their legs, viewed on videotape, are inverted (Rochat & Morgan, 1995, 1998). Other research reveals that infants recognize their own voices, faces, and body movements as different from those of others, suggesting the origins of a rudimentary understanding of self as separate and distinct from other people and objects well before the end of the first year (Legerstee, Anderson, & Schaffer, 1998; Rochat & Striano, 2002; Tomasello, 1995). These capacities very likely serve as precursors to the representation of self as object. *Self-awareness*, however, is usually said to begin with the child’s ability to declare or indicate in a fairly specific way, “That’s me!” When do young children have this “idea of me”?

● **Self-recognition** The household mirror has become a helpful research tool in answering the question of when self-recognition emerges. A toddler younger than fifteen to eighteen months shows little evidence of recognizing herself in a mirror. How do we know? If a spot of rouge, for example, is placed surreptitiously on her nose, it is not until she is older than this age that she will touch or rub her nose while looking in the mirror. Such behavior suggests that she has formed a concept of the details that ordinarily make up her appearance. In just a few more months she will also say, “That’s me” when asked, “Who’s that?” as she stares at a picture or a reflection of herself. Moreover, this self-recognition emerges about the same time in children from widely varying backgrounds (Cicchetti et al., 1997).

The implications of becoming aware of physical appearance can be enormous. For one thing, it may signal the appearance of self-conscious emotions, such as embarrassment, shame, and pride, that emerge in toddlers, as we saw in the discussion of

emotional development in the chapter titled “Emotion” (Lewis et al., 1989). For another, self-recognition seems to develop hand in hand with a growing awareness of others as distinct individuals. For example, a toddler who displays self-recognition on the mirror task also is likely to attend to a partner of a similar age and to encourage that child to play with matching toys, an indication of increased interest in sharing and enjoyment of the other child’s activities (Asendorpf & Baudonnière, 1993). Thus, at a very young age, children have begun to unwrap a major piece of the total package of their self-concept, the first of many steps in the development of their identities.

● **Self-definition** A self-concept consists of much more than appearance. If asked to answer the question “Who are you?” a preschooler might say, “I’m a boy. I’m strong. I know the letters of the alphabet. I like pizza. I live with my mother and father. I go to nursery school.” Thus, during the preschool years, knowledge of self extends beyond physical features to include activities the child likes and is good at, his possessions, and his relationships to others. In defining themselves, children at this age commonly establish a **categorical self**, that is, classify themselves in terms of membership in certain groups based on their sex, age, skills, what they own, where they live, and who their friends are.

Are very young children also aware of having psychological and social attributes? As we pointed out in the chapter titled “Cognition: Piaget and Vygotsky,” preschoolers know quite a bit about their own mental activities. They possess knowledge of themselves that goes beyond appearance and actions. Thus responses such as “I have a friend” or “I’m a happy person” are among their self-descriptions. Preschoolers consistently select self-statements that reflect moods, feelings, achievements, and other psychological and social orientations. Self as object, as *me*, even for a young child, includes a sense of a psychological and social being (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 1999).

Between five and seven years of age children increasingly coordinate the attributes they apply to themselves (Harter, 1999). When children reach about seven years of age, a new element enters their self-descriptions. Whereas younger children describe themselves in terms of typical categorical activities (“I run fast”), older children begin to make relational statements. For example, in response to the question “Who are you?” a fifth-grader might say, “I can run faster than anyone else in my class,” “I’m not as pretty as my older sister,” or “Other kids in my class are better than I am at math.” Instead of itemizing their skills, actions, or social and psychological qualities, they compare their qualities with those of others (Ruble, 1983; Harter, 1999).

As children become older, they view self in terms of more abstract and increasingly differentiated qualities (Harter & Monsour, 1992); thus a global notion of self fails to capture the full complexity of this concept. Even preschool children have some understanding of domain-specific representations (DesRosiers et al., 1999; Marsh, Ellis, & Craven, 2002), but during the elementary school years children effectively distinguish self in terms of, for example, academic abilities, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, social skills, and athletic competence (Cole et al., 2001; Hymel et al., 1999).

Self tends to be evaluated very highly by preschoolers and somewhat less positively in the early elementary school years, as children acquire a better understanding of their limitations and strengths at that time. Their self-concepts show some positive increases in most domains in the later elementary school years but then tend to dip again as they enter the adolescent years. Moreover, gender differences exist in how favorable these different domains of self are perceived, as can be seen in Figure 12.1. In addition, the emphasis on portraying different domains of self increasingly focuses on the implications of those domains for social relationships. The change is evident in such responses from young adolescents as, “I play sports . . . because all the kids like athletes” and “I’m an honest person . . . people trust me because of it” (Damon & Hart, 1988).

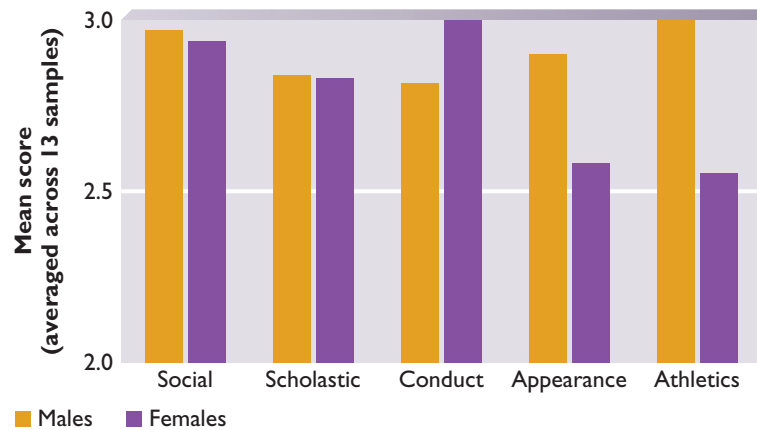
During adolescence, self also begins to be viewed from multiple or even opposing perspectives. Susan Harter (1986) asked whether someone can have both positive and negative qualities. Can a person be both “smart” and “dumb” or “nice” and “nasty”? She found a substantial increase in the belief in this possibility between the

KEY THEME**Interaction Among Domains**

categorical self Conceptual process, starting in the early preschool years, in which the child begins to classify himself or herself according to easily observable categories such as sex, age, or physical capacities.

FIGURE 12.1
Evaluations of Self as
a Function of Gender

The different domains of self are not always evaluated equally. Females consistently give less favorable ratings (on a 4-point scale) to their appearance and to their athletic ability than do males. These data have been averaged over thirteen different studies carried out by Susan Harter with children from elementary school through high school (Harter, 1999). In addition, research cited by Harter (1999) and carried out by others in England, Ireland, Australia, and many non-English speaking countries, including Switzerland, Italy, Holland, China, Japan, and Korea, reveals a similar pattern of findings.



Source: Harter, 1999, p. 131.

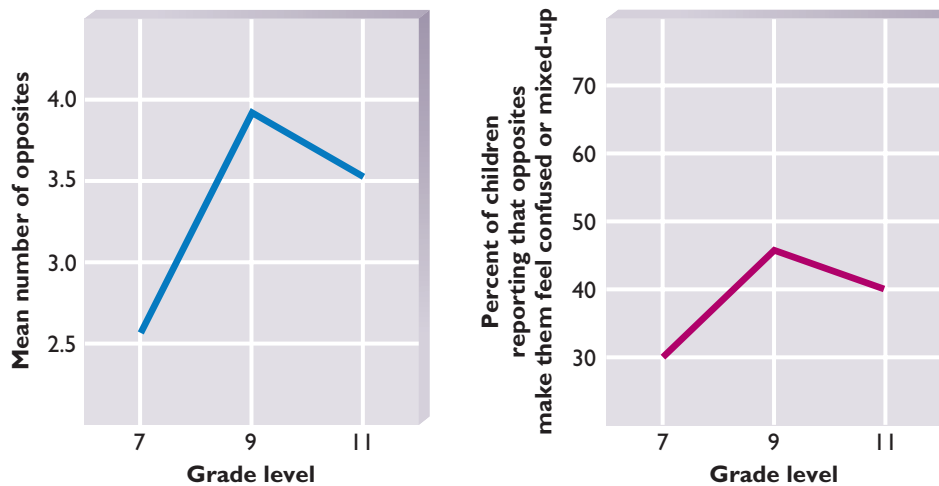
seventh and ninth grades. The number of opposite perspectives, and concerns about feeling confused or bothered by qualities of self that conflict when, for example, interacting with parents, with friends, in a romantic relationship, or as a member of the classroom, become greatest during middle adolescence, as Figure 12.2 indicates (Harter & Monsour, 1992).

The impetus for conflicting selves may arise from a desire to impress or gain increased acceptance or simply as part of experimentation during the teenage years. Under these circumstances, “false” selves appear to be a normal and even healthy aspect of development. However, if, as may be the case for some adolescents, the inconsistencies arise from a belief that approval is contingent on “showing different faces” at the expense of one’s true self, these conflicts may lead to more serious consequences, such as feeling depressed and confused about self (Harter et al., 1996). Fortunately, concerns about conflicting selves typically lessen for most adolescents as adolescents become older and establish a higher order coherent picture of self based on principled ideas and comprehensive plans that include a more extended future and greater understanding of their strengths and limitations.

Can cultural, religious, and social class differences, which are highly laden with values in their own right, influence the development of self-concepts? William Damon and Daniel Hart (1988) believe such influence is likely. In some societies, for example, possessions or membership in the family or a social group may be far more important in determining perceptions of self than individual qualities, abilities, and achievements (Levine & White, 1986). To illustrate their point, Damon and Hart (1988) studied children living in a fishing village in Puerto Rico. The residents were relatively poor and had few educational and social services available to them. Children typically attended school for no more than three or four years, and obtaining a job often depended on a network of family and social relationships. Compared with middle-income youngsters from mainland regions of the United States, Puerto Rican children voiced far more apprehension about whether their *behavior* was good or bad than whether they were competent or talented. A twelve-year-old might say it is important to be nice and respect people because misbehavior would mean “everybody will hit me and hate me or not help me.” Compared with their mainland counterparts, Puerto Rican children consistently expressed greater concern about whether others approved of their actions than about their relative competence with respect to some skill or capacity.

In still other cultures that place greater emphasis on contributions to the collective community than on individual accomplishments—for example, the Samoan society and in many Asian countries—evaluations of self in terms of particular competencies may not be seen as desirable. As a consequence, greater modesty is demanded in describing one’s personal qualities. Because children’s views of themselves are heavily

KEY THEME
Sociocultural Influence



Source: Harter & Monsour, 1992.

FIGURE 12.2
Concerns About Opposing Attributes

From early to middle adolescence, students increasingly report conflicting descriptions of self that depend on whether their evaluations are framed within the perspective of classroom, friends, close relationships, or parents. Concerns about these conflicting views increase at the same time. However, both the number of opposite attributes assigned to self and concerns about their effects on defining self begin to decline in later adolescence, as young people establish a more integrated identity and recognize that contradictions may be normal and even of some value.

influenced by social structure and the expectations of the community, as well as styles of parenting and formal education, the picture of an emerging self in many societies may differ substantially from that typically observed in many Western nations.

● **Social Comparison** During the early and middle school years, as we already indicated, children begin to reference others in describing themselves. Whether Jim feels he is nice or can run fast, or Ellen believes she is smart or throws a ball well, depends on how Jim or Ellen thinks he or she stacks up against agemates and friends. How important is this process, called **social comparison**, the tendency of people to use others as mirrors to evaluate their own abilities, interests, and values? The answer appears to be that it becomes increasingly important as children move through the elementary school years. For example, nine-year-olds who could not actually determine their success but were told they did better than, or not as well as, peers in a ball-throwing contest predicted future performance based on the feedback they received. If told they were successful, they expected to show continued superior ability; if told they were less successful, they expected to continue to perform more poorly than children who received no feedback. Five- and seven-year-olds, however, were unaffected by the information; they predicted they would do equally well, regardless of how they compared with others (Ruble et al., 1980).

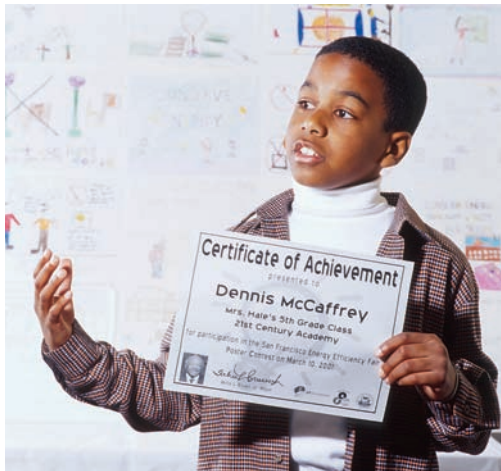
Children, of course, observe things happening to others even in the preschool years. Two pieces of candy of unequal size shared between two four-year-olds can easily initiate conflict about who has the larger piece and is probably motivated by concerns about obtaining a fair share. And preschoolers are able to compare their performance to that of other children when asked to make judgments about a relatively simple task such as who drew a line farther within a winding path in a particular amount of time (Butler, 1998). At this age, however, observing others seems to be geared toward learning how to respond or to gain new skills for mastering a task (Butler, 1989; Ruble & Dweck, 1995).

In fact, young children frequently are unrealistic about their skills; they claim they will do far better than they actually can (Butler, 1990; Harter, 1999). Moreover, kindergartners rate themselves more positively than older children do and tend to ignore feedback to adjust their evaluations, particularly when information about failure is indicated (Ruble, Eisenberg, & Higgins, 1994). However, by attending to the attributes and qualities of others, children may gain a more realistic means of predicting how well they can do. For example, Diane Ruble (1987) found that children in kindergarten and first grade who more frequently made social comparisons involving achievement tended to have greater knowledge of their relative standing in the classroom.

KEY THEME

Child's Active Role

social comparison Process in which individuals define themselves in relation to the skills, attributes, and qualities of others; an important contributor to self-concept during middle childhood.



This fifth-grade boy exhibits pride in the certificate of achievement he received as he describes his work on a project designed to save energy. Such positive feedback can play an important role in promoting continued academic effort. As he enters into and proceeds through the adolescent years, he will increasingly rely on his own standards for determining whether he has done a good job in the various activities he undertakes.

KEY THEME

Child's Active Role

KEY THEME

Nature/Nurture

effectance motivation Inborn desire theorized by Robert White to be the basis for the infant's and child's efforts to master and gain control of the environment.

Older school-age children engage in increasingly subtle, indirect social comparisons to determine how well they are doing, perhaps because more conspicuous forms of information gathering are perceived as inappropriate behaviors. For example, nine- or ten-year-olds are more likely than younger children to ask classmates, "What question are you on?" to assess their progress among peers (Pomerantz et al., 1995). On the other hand, the kind of educational environment in which children participate also influences this behavior. In Israel, for example, children in kibbutz schools, which place greater emphasis on cooperative activity than more traditional urban schools in that country, continue to be more likely to interpret glances among one another as efforts to increase mastery rather than as social comparisons (Butler & Ruzany, 1993).

As children approach the adolescent years and become more competent, they are less likely to look to others to evaluate how well they are doing; in some domains, such as academic achievement, they can use their own measures of performance on a task to judge success (Ruble & Flett, 1988). This may indicate an impending shift from social comparison to a more self-reliant and principled standard for evaluating self. This basis for a self-concept, rooted in internalized values and norms of mastery and competence, fits the criteria mature individuals use to evaluate their identities and often is observed in later adolescence and early adulthood. But throughout the early and middle adolescent years, concern with the views and expectations of others, especially peers, and in many cases parents and teachers, is far-reaching (Harter, 1999).

Self as Subject

Just as we can ask a child what she knows about her physical features or personal characteristics, so too can we ask whether she realizes that she influences and controls her surroundings, remains the same person over time, or is a unique individual. Such questions inquire about a child's understanding of her sense of agency or autonomy, individuality, and stability and her capacity to reflect on these abilities. What do children know about such matters?

- **The Sense of Agency** The belief that a person can determine and influence his or her surroundings probably has its roots in infancy. Robert White (1959) suggested that babies are born with a desire to master their environment, an ambition he termed **effectance motivation**. The active infant repeatedly stacks blocks, bangs pots, smiles at caregivers, and plays peek-a-boo, activities that often lead to consequences that he anticipates. If he cries, he typically is picked up, rocked, and comforted. The one-year-old who says "Mama" or another new word often becomes the center of attention. From the feedback associated with these actions, infants may learn to expect outcomes and how to make them happen again. Eventually, they see themselves as being in control, capable of reaching desired goals, and having the means to do so as they interact with both their physical and social environments (Wachs & Combs, 1995). For example, when babies can make a mobile rotate rapidly by moving their heads on a pressure-sensitive pillow, they quickly learn to do so. But if their head movements on the pillow initially fail to have any consequences, they are far less likely to learn a contingency-related outcome when it is established (Watson, 1971; Watson & Ramey, 1972).

Many of the early accomplishments exhibited by infants are accompanied by positive emotional responses such as delight and laughter (Case, 1991; Harter, 1998). Toward the end of the first year and continuing into the second, children start to initiate efforts to share interesting sights and activities with caregivers and playmates, an important step in becoming aware of their ability to influence what others see and do. After about two years of age, many will protest the attempts of caregivers to help them in an activity such as dressing. Some researchers believe such protests further reveal an early desire to be an agent or to master an activity (Kagan, 1981; Lutkenhaus, Bullock, & Geppert, 1987). At about this same time, children also look to adults after completing a task as though to share their success or turn away and hunch their



This infant may have already gained a rudimentary sense of agency. His outstretched arms seem to shout, “Pick me up!” His behavior illustrates one of the many ways even babies actively influence the things that happen to them.

shoulders after failure (Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992). The feedback mothers provide to two-year-olds following their efforts to solve a problem plays an important role in the way they subsequently respond to a challenging task. When mothers are more negative and critical, their children are increasingly likely to display shame in confronting a difficult problem as three-year-olds. When mothers are more supportive and provide a scaffold to assist in solving a problem, their children display greater persistence when confronted with an achievement-oriented task when they are older (Kelley, Brownell, & Campbell, 2000).

Children become increasingly sophisticated about how the world responds to their actions. For example, if asked, “How did you get to be the way you are?” a preschooler is likely to refer to uncontrollable factors (“I just grew My body just got bigger”), whereas a ten-year-old mentions her own efforts (“From getting good grades in school from studying”). By age thirteen, children also acknowledge the contributions of others to their sense of agency (“I learned from my parents, I even learned from friends, just listening to them and talking to them”). Older adolescents incorporate into their reasoning principled personal and moral qualities (“Well, I decided to be kind to people because I’ve seen lots of kids hurt other kids’ feelings for no reason, and it’s not right or fair”) (Damon & Hart, 1988). Even in societies that have emphasized a more collective orientation, such as Russia, most children believe individual effort is an important aspect of achieving success and avoiding failure (Stetsenko et al., 1995). For example, elementary school children in Los Angeles, Tokyo, Berlin, Moscow, and Prague are in close agreement in their views that effort in particular, rather than other factors such as the teacher or luck or even ability, is the most important determinant of school performance (Little & Lopez, 1997).

Yet, within every community, individuals can differ substantially in their sense of self-determination and control. Some children are convinced that what happens to them depends on their actions, that their choices, decisions, and abilities govern whether outcomes are good or bad, successful or unsuccessful. When asked how to find a friend, such a child might say, “Go up to someone you like and ask them to play with you.” When asked how to do well on a test, the child might answer, “Study for it and you’ll get smarter!” Such children have a strong **mastery orientation**, a belief that success stems from trying hard; failures, these children presume, are conditions to be overcome by working more or by investing greater effort (Dweck & Elliott, 1983).

KEY THEME

Individual Differences

mastery orientation Belief that achievements are based on one’s own efforts rather than on luck or other factors beyond one’s control.

Positive feedback from a parent is an important element in a child's taking pride in her achievements. Even by helping out with routine chores, a child can gain a sense of mastery that generalizes to her efforts involving academic and other activities.



Other children, in contrast, believe luck, fate, or other people have an inordinate influence on what happens to them. When asked why he cannot catch a ball, such a child might say, “The others throw it too fast.” When asked why he got a poor grade, he might say, “The teacher doesn’t like me.” His explanation for a good grade might be, “I was lucky.” Such children often express little confidence in their ability and feel powerless to influence the future. They perceive themselves as being unable to achieve, perhaps because their efforts have not led to regular success. In place of a sense of mastery, they have a sense of **learned helplessness** (Dweck & Elliott, 1983).

These differing interpretations about success and failure are linked to another property of the belief system. To the extent that children think the characteristics they and others display are stable *entities*, that is, fixed or unchangeable qualities or traits such as being smart, friendly, or popular, the more vulnerable they are to a helpless orientation. As a consequence, when faced with a challenging situation, the focus tends to be on evaluating how well they perform or “measure up” rather than on what steps might be taken to improve their performance or activity. In contrast, when children hold beliefs that characteristics or traits of individuals are *incremental* or malleable and can therefore be changed, their focus in challenging situations is more likely to be directed toward learning procedures and strategies reflecting resilience and increased effort (Erdley et al., 1997; Heyman & Dweck, 1998). Why might this be so? If traits are seen as enduring characteristics, little can be done to change them; thus the child places greater emphasis on determining the degree to which he or she (and others) possesses them as indicated by *performance* on the problem or task. On the other hand, if traits are seen as temporary characteristics, then the child can focus on the processes required to improve on or modify them, that is, on better ways of *learning* the task or how to solve the problem (Dweck, 1999).

Differing beliefs about the degree to which traits are fixed or modifiable and the causes of success or failure have a powerful bearing on academic achievement, participation in athletics and other physical activities, efforts to establish social relationships, self-esteem, and career aspirations (Bandura et al., 2001; Chapman, Skinner, & Baltes, 1990; Heyman & Dweck, 1998). Children who display evidence of learned helplessness in school, for example, may be caught in a vicious cycle involving self-fulfilling anticipation of failure accompanied by excuses that they have little control over what happens to them (Bandura et al., 1996). They are especially likely to expect failure on tasks found difficult in the past and may avoid them when given further opportunity to work on them (Dweck, 1991; Erdley et al., 1997). Note that high abil-

learned helplessness Belief that one has little control over situations, perhaps because of lack of ability or inconsistent outcomes.

ity is not the factor that determines a mastery orientation (Dweck, 1999). Deborah Phillips (1984) reported that nearly 20 percent of fifth-graders with high ability limit their goals and persistence in school activities. In the academic realm, this pattern occurs more frequently among girls than boys, perhaps because girls are more likely than boys to view their failures in terms of such uncontrollable factors as lack of ability (Crandall, 1969; Dweck, Goetz, & Strauss, 1980; Stipek & Hoffman, 1980).

A mastery-versus-helplessness orientation can be observed in kindergarteners and remains stable for up to five years (Ziegert et al., 2001). However, teachers can have an important influence on children's beliefs about their academic competence. When teachers provide a supportive, responsive learning environment, children come to believe that they have greater control over their understanding of academic materials and, as a consequence, become more actively engaged, as well as more successful in their efforts. Where learning environments are unsupportive, children are more likely to conclude that external factors are responsible for what happens, which, in turn, leads to less satisfaction and lower achievement in the classroom. Longitudinal data reveals that these differences in perceived control form a cyclic pattern of confidence and success that feed into and magnify individual differences in children's views of beliefs about their achievements and failures in the classroom (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1998).

RESEARCH APPLIED TO PARENTING

Preventing Learned Helplessness

The rule in Michael's house was that once homework was finished, the remaining time before bedtime was his to do with as he wished. He often played chess with his grandfather. This evening, however, his grandfather had become busy on another project. "Perhaps just as well," thought Michael as he reflected on the earlier exchange that had so angered his grandfather. Michael dialed his friend Jonathon. "Can you play some catch?" he queried when Jonathon answered the phone. "You must have finished your math already," Jonathon retorted. "I hate math, still have a lot more problems to do," he continued. But Michael quickly interjected, "You did really well on that last test." But before he could finish, Michael knew what Jonathon's reply would be: "I was lucky. The teacher asked the right questions. I wish I were good at math."

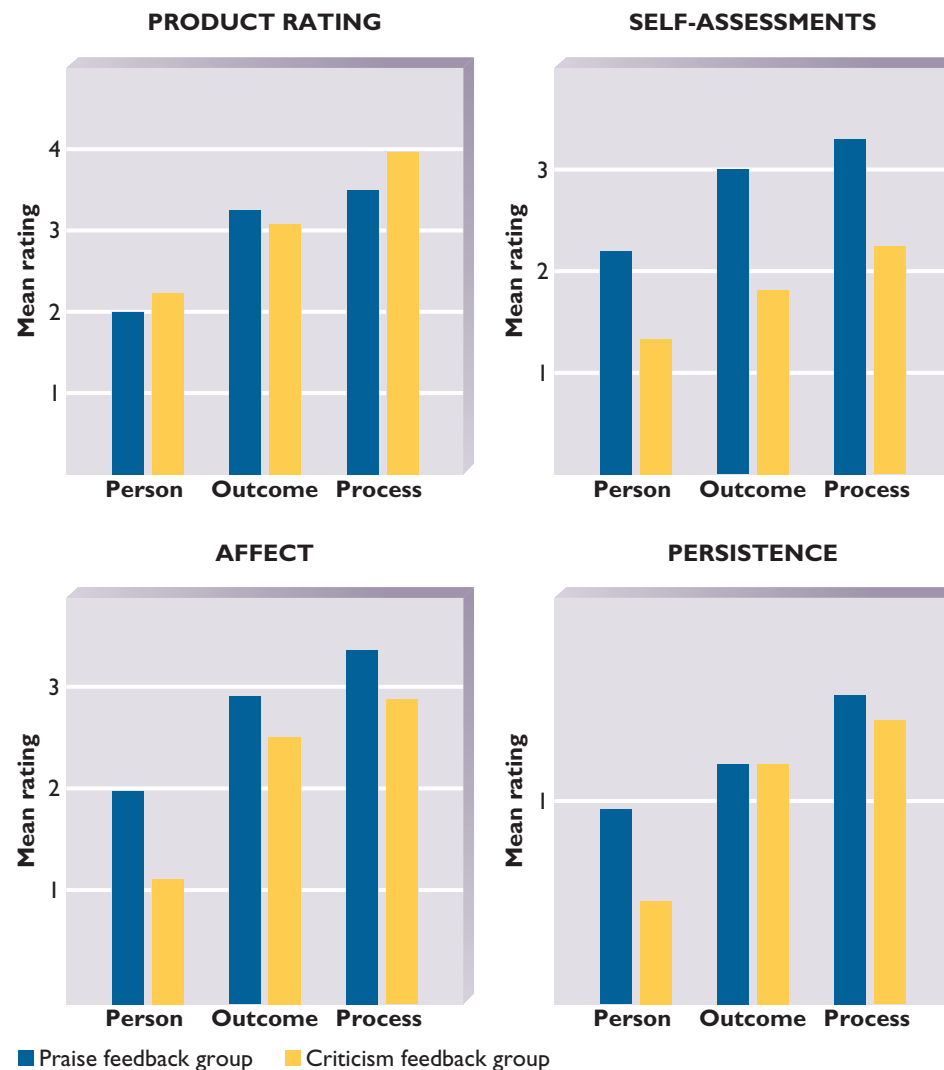
Children who gain little mastery over their environment or face conflicting and inconsistent reactions, such as those they might receive from abusive parents, are among the most likely to display learned helplessness. But even well-intentioned parents and teachers may unwittingly help to foster a sense of helplessness. For example, when parents generally believe they can promote their children's intellectual development, their children seem to benefit (Bandura et al., 1996). Moreover, the seeds of a sense of helplessness, Carol Dweck (1999) believes, are sown in preschoolers who tend to judge their performance on tasks as "good" or "bad." When the value of self becomes contingent on feeling worthy or unworthy, young children become especially vulnerable to learned helplessness.

A recent study conducted by Melissa Kamins and Carol Dweck (1999) provides some experimental evidence to indicate that certain types of feedback with respect to either criticism or praise can lead to a more helpless orientation when children are subsequently confronted with similar situations involving a setback. In this study five- and six-year-olds engaged in role-playing a series of four different stories that involved various tasks. In each of these tasks, children acted in the role of a doll, either making an error or completing the task successfully. At the end of each story the experimenter (who was engaged in role-playing as the teacher) provided one of three different types of feedback. When the task involved an error, the feedback from the "teacher" was directed either at the person (e.g., "I'm very disappointed in you"), at the outcome of the task ("That's not the right way to do it"), or at the process that

FIGURE 12.3

The Consequences of Different Types of Feedback for Learned Helplessness

When given praise or criticism for their work on a task, children may hear comments that are directed at them as a person (“good,” “bad”), at the outcome (“right way to do it,” “wrong way to do it”), or at the process (“really tried hard,” “think of another way”). Hearing these different types of feedback influences how children subsequently respond to a setback on a similar task. Children who have heard person-oriented feedback evaluate the outcome of the new work less positively (product rating), view themselves as having fewer positive abilities (self-assessment), feel less happy with themselves (affect), and are less willing to continue the activity (persistence) than children who experience process-oriented feedback and, to a lesser extent, outcome-oriented feedback. Moreover, these kinds of responses are produced even though errors have not occurred in the previous tasks and children have heard praise. The results suggest that the extent to which children express a sense of helplessness after experiencing a setback is affected by the specific form of praise or criticism they have heard in previous similar situations.



Source: Adapted from Kamins & Dweck, 1999.

contributed to the error in the task (“Maybe you can think of *another* way to do it”). (Special effort was made to ensure that the children understood they were role-playing and that the scenarios were pretend situations.) When praise for success was administered, the child heard something like, “I’m very proud of you,” or “That’s the right way to do it,” or “You must have tried really hard” for the person, outcome, and process feedback conditions, respectively.

How would children respond after role-playing in a similar but new task when a setback occurred? To answer this question the researchers asked children to evaluate how well the new problem had been completed (product rating), how performance in the task reflected abilities such as being good, bad, smart, not so smart, and so forth (self-assessment), whether they felt happy or sad (affect), and their willingness to continue in the role-playing activity or to attempt to correct the error (persistence). The results are shown in Figure 12.3. Higher scores indicate a more positive rating.

The results revealed a consistent pattern of reactions typical of helplessness when the emphasis in the feedback had been on the person (and to a lesser extent, on the outcome) than when the feedback focused on the process of completing the task effectively. Somewhat surprisingly, this relationship held up whether the children had been exposed earlier to criticism or to praise in the role-playing activity, a finding reported by other researchers as well (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). These findings and

the research of many others suggest that parents can take several steps to reduce the likelihood that children will acquire a sense of learned helplessness:

1. *Avoid frequent criticism and punishment, especially of younger children.* The younger child who is often criticized or punished for, say, being messy or failing to finish a task may be particularly susceptible to the belief that he is “bad.” In arriving at this stable view of his personality, he may have little reason to try to do better or may shun similar challenges to avoid receiving further negative evaluations. Thus it is important that parents help the younger child to avoid feelings of shame or limited self-worth when evaluating behavior (Kelley et al., 2000).

2. *Motivate effort by identifying positive process approaches to problem solving.* As children become older and more knowledgeable, parents and teachers can promote a mastery orientation by emphasizing the various skills and procedures important to success, that is, what children can do to more effectively achieve a goal. Such feedback should help children to appreciate the malleability of traits and capacities.

3. *Attribute poor performance to factors other than ability.* When a child does perform poorly, a parent’s or teacher’s evaluation should focus on nonintellectual and temporary factors that may have reduced the child’s performance rather than on her intrinsic ability, thereby inspiring effort when the next opportunity arises.

4. *View activities as opportunities to learn rather than as tests of ability.* Parents and teachers can encourage children to approach academic tasks as opportunities to learn rather than as situations in which their performance will be evaluated in terms of competence (or lack of competence) (Dweck, 1999; Erdley et al., 1997).

Younger children must be convinced that their failures and successes are not the outcome of being “bad” or “good.” Older children should be assured that shortcomings in performance on, say, academic tasks stem less from lack of ability than from insufficient effort or some other factor that can be modified. Children who already have acquired an orientation to learned helplessness can benefit from *attribution retraining*, a procedure designed to change their beliefs about the cause of their failures. This procedure emphasizes tying lack of success more directly to poor or ineffective effort than to inability. Attribution retraining has become an effective method of replacing self-limiting styles and attitudes with positive approaches to success, a means of converting learned helplessness into a greater sense of mastery and agency (Dweck, 1986).



Schoolwork should be viewed as an opportunity for learning rather than as a situation in which performance is being evaluated. A child who takes pride in his work and believes that he can accomplish the tasks he is assigned often gains confidence and the motivation to be more successful.

● **The Sense of Individuality** How does a child know that she cannot become someone else? In other words, what do children understand about individuality and uniqueness? In one study young people were asked, “What makes you different from everybody else in the world?” Preschoolers usually answered with their names (“Cause there is only one person with my name”), their possessions, or specific features of their bodies. Eight- to ten-year-olds added comparative statements involving abilities, activities, and personality (“Well, I think I’m friendlier than most kids I know”). Young adolescents were more likely to list unique psychological and other traits (“Yeah, I worry too much and a lot of things that a lot of kids don’t care about”). Older adolescents adopted even stronger views involving unique personal feelings and orientations (“Nobody else sees things or feels the same way about things as I do”) (Damon & Hart, 1988).

The answer that emerges from this research is that the child gains his sense of individuality early and first links it to observable physical characteristics and features. As children grow, they begin to compare themselves with others, especially their private feelings and thoughts, and these qualities become the central criteria for their claim to uniqueness.

● **The Sense of Stability** Is an individual essentially the same person today that she was a year ago or will be a year from now? As with the sense of individuality, a child’s understanding of continuity begins quite early, but the explanation for this stability changes with development. Preschoolers have more difficulty than older children recognizing that changes in mood, weight, and even age or height are possible while still retaining one’s identity (Bales & Sera, 1995). When asked, “If you change from year to year, how do you know it’s still always you?” preschoolers cite their names (“My name, and then I would know if it was me if someone called me”), physical features, possessions, or other categorical qualities as proof. An eight- to ten-year-old is likely to refer to stable personal or internal qualities (“I know it’s me because I still know the things I knew five years ago”). Young adolescents link the sense of continuity to others (“I’ll still have my family. They always know I’m me and not someone else”). Older adolescents are likely to state their certainty more abstractly (“Well, nothing about me always stays the same, but I am always kind of like I was awhile ago”) (Damon & Hart, 1988).

As in the case of individuality, children’s sense of a stable self gradually expands from physical, highly observable attributes to include both inner psychological and broader contextual elements. Moreover, as children mature, they judge inner psychological qualities as increasingly important in decisions about their stability of self (Aboud & Skerry, 1983). Children and adolescents are also more likely to anticipate greater similarity between their present and future selves than between past and present selves (Hart, Fegley, & Brengelman, 1993). Still, anticipated changes in future selves are positive ones; children and adolescents expect to lose undesirable characteristics as they mature.

● **The Sense of Reflection** When does the ability to reflect on or contemplate the self emerge? Perhaps not until early adolescence, when its advent, along with new ways of thinking abstractly, helps to explain the preoccupations of young teenagers with appearance and worth, that is, a growing self-consciousness about who they are (Elkind, 1981; Selman, 1980). Another consequence of the capacity to reflect on the self is a greater appreciation of how the mind contributes to experience. A fourteen-year-old may say, “I can fool myself into thinking I don’t miss my lost puppy.” Yet an older adolescent often realizes that completely controlling her feelings, even if she is unaware of them, may not be possible. Thus the sense of reflection forms the basis for eventually distinguishing between the influence of conscious and unconscious psychological processes on behavior (Damon & Hart, 1988).

KEY THEME

Interaction Among Domains

self-esteem One’s feelings of worth; extent to which one senses one’s attributes and actions are good, desired, and valued.

Self-esteem: Evaluating Self

A child’s description of self often includes an evaluation component. **Self-esteem** or self-worth is specifically concerned with the positive feelings of merit and the extent

to which the child believes his attributes and actions are good, desired, and valued (Davis-Kean & Sandler, 2001). This aspect of self appears to be related to social affiliations, success in school, and overall mental health (Dusek, 2000; Harter, 1999; Kling et al., 1999). For example, later life satisfaction and happiness have been linked to high self-esteem (Bachman, 1970; Crandall, 1973); depression, anxiety, and poor adjustment in school and social relationships have been associated with low self-esteem (Damon, 1983; Zimmerman et al., 1997).

● **Defining Self-esteem** How should we describe a child's self-esteem if the child takes pride in how smart she is, concludes that she is not very good at sports (but sports are unimportant anyway), and is unsure whether she is pretty enough to become a movie star? Work by Susan Harter and others (Harter, 1999; Eccles, Wigfield, et al., 1993; Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1998) has revealed that children often give different evaluations of self when asked about academic competence, athletic skill, social acceptance, or physical appearance. Still, by about eight years of age, children can give answers to such global questions as "Do you like yourself?" and "Are you happy the way you are?" The responses to these broad inquiries, however, are not simple summations of all the different evaluations made with respect to specific attributes and abilities, and they can vary across situations and time (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998). What, then, are some of the factors that influence how a child arrives at a global sense of worth?

William James (1892) theorized that self-esteem depends on the success a person feels in areas in which she wants to succeed. Others emphasize that self-esteem originates in how a person thinks others see him; the *generalized other*—the combined perceived evaluations of parents, peers, and teachers influential in a person's life—helps to determine sense of worth (Cooley, 1902; Felson, 1993; Mead, 1934).

Both success in a highly regarded domain and the perceived evaluations of others do appear to affect self-esteem. Harter (1987) obtained ratings of how children viewed themselves in scholastic competence, athletic competence, social acceptance, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct and in terms of global success. Children were also asked how critical it was for them to do well in each of these domains. Harter reasoned that greater discrepancies between perceived competence and the importance of a domain, especially one highly valued, would be linked to lower self-esteem. Children also rated how others (parents, peers) viewed them, felt they were important, liked them, and so on.

For children in the third to eighth grades, the more an area rated as important outstripped a child's perception of her competence, the lower was the child's sense of her overall worth. In fact, children with low self-esteem seemed to have trouble disregarding the significance of domains in which they were not skilled (Harter, 1985). In contrast, children with high self-esteem minimized the value of those fields in which they were not especially competent and gained considerable satisfaction from areas in which they were relatively successful. But Harter found the perceived social support of others also correlated with the child's sense of self-worth. As Figure 12.4 shows, elementary school children with low discrepancy *and* high social support scores showed superior levels of self-worth. Children with high discrepancy and low social support displayed the lowest levels of self-esteem. Both factors contributed to overall sense of worth. Thus efforts to improve self-esteem in children may require both a supportive social milieu and the formation and acceptance of realistic personal goals.

Are some domains more important than others for a child's overall sense of worth? The answer appears to be yes. Boys and girls of elementary and middle school age who are dissatisfied with and keenly concerned about their physical appearance tend to have lower self-esteem. Although discrepancies are also important in other domains, they correlate less highly with judgments of overall self-worth. Harter (1987, 1998) speculates that in American culture, the relationship stems from the enormous emphasis on physical appearance in movies, television, and teen magazines as the key to

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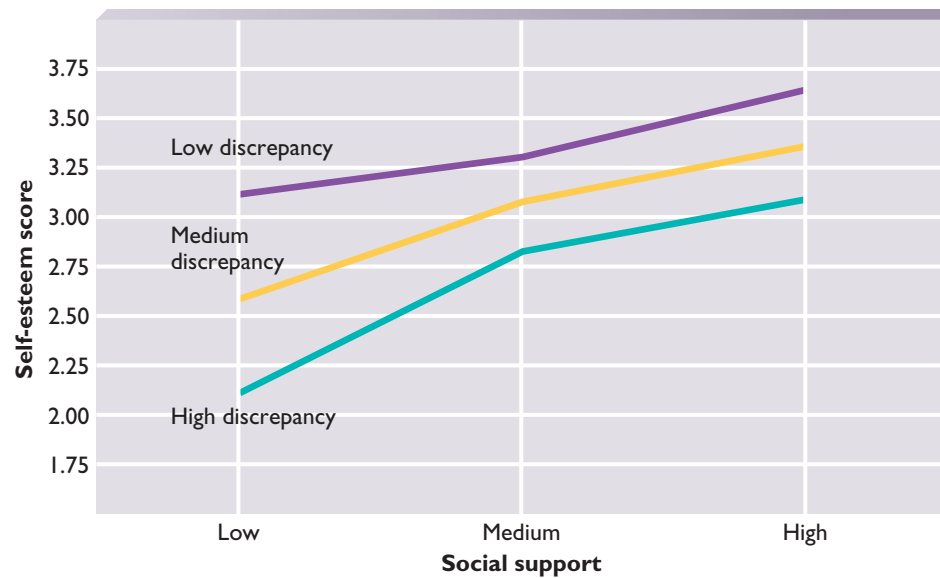
Child's Active Role

KEY THEME

Interaction Among Domains

FIGURE 12.4
How Self-esteem Develops

Self-esteem reflects the combined influence of social support and the discrepancy between the child's perceived and desired competence in some ability or attribute. Harter divided elementary school children into three groups based on these two measures. Those with the highest self-esteem reported high social support and a low discrepancy between perceived and desired competence. Those with the lowest self-esteem reported low social support and a high discrepancy between perceived and desired competence. The findings suggest that parents, teachers, and others concerned with increasing self-esteem need to consider both the kind of social encouragement and positive regard they provide and children's own beliefs about what is important.



Source: Adapted from Harter, 1987.

success and acceptance. As children become older, discrepancy scores on social acceptance take on increasingly greater significance, whereas discrepancy scores on athletic competence show a decline in importance (Harter, 1987). Nevertheless, positive assessments of physical appearance continue to be an important predictor of higher self-esteem for boys and girls as they enter the adolescent years (DuBois et al., 2000; Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994).

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● **Developmental Changes in Self-esteem** In general, the self-esteem of children in early elementary school is high. Yet as they approach adolescence, self-esteem for a substantial portion, especially girls, declines (Block & Robins, 1993; Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). The change accompanies major transitions, such as the onset of puberty, entry into junior high school, and substantial realignments in friendship patterns. Often the decline accompanies a lowering of perceived competence in academic subjects such as math.

During the change to junior high, daily hassles tend to increase, whereas teacher support and extracurricular activities decline, all factors correlated with a decrease in self-esteem, especially among disadvantaged children regardless of ethnic or racial background (Seidman et al., 1994). However, when adolescents retain a warm, strong orientation toward others and perceive their parents as being attuned to and supportive of their efforts in decision making, they are more likely to maintain high self-esteem throughout these transitions (Lord et al., 1994). And as our earlier discussion of a sense of agency suggests, coping strategies that lead young people to attribute success to their competence and mastery are certainly another critical element in maintaining high self-esteem (Brooks, 1992).

KEY THEME

Sociocultural Influence

Relatively little cross-cultural research on self-esteem has been reported, although several studies comparing children from the United States and Taiwan have revealed a consistent pattern: Taiwanese children report lower self-esteem than their counterparts in the United States (Chiu, 1992–1993; Stigler, Smith, & Mao, 1985; Turner & Mo, 1984). The reasons may stem from cultural practices in Taiwan that emphasize humility rather than pride in one's accomplishments or qualities and provide less opportunity to receive social or public displays of success in academic and other settings. Also, Taiwanese family-rearing patterns emphasize obedience rather than individual achievement, and although children in Taiwan often do excel academically, other ways of gaining high self-esteem may be less available to them.

CONTROVERSY: THINKING IT OVER***Is Praise Always a Good Thing?***

In the discussion of ways to prevent learned helplessness, one finding by Kamins and Dweck (1999) may come as a surprise to many. Kamins and Dweck noted that praise directed toward children for success did not necessarily inoculate the children from reporting a greater sense of helplessness when faced with a setback in a new task. Are we to conclude that praise (such as “I am really proud of you,” “You are really smart,” “You are a star”) is not a particularly good means of promoting effective behavior?

What Is the Controversy?

If there is one prescription that many parents and professionals in Western societies, and particularly in the United States, would offer for encouraging the development of a competent child, it very likely would be to praise generously for his or her accomplishments. As Carol Dweck (1999) points out, it is one of our most treasured assumptions. Enlightened parents attempt to (and often do) follow such a practice, and many teachers and others working with children are advised to unstintingly administer praise to promote learning. Yet in their recent examination of the effects of praise on children, Jennifer Henderlong and Mark Lepper (2002) have concluded that the research literature often paints a far different picture of its motivational consequences for children.

What Are the Opposing Arguments?

Learning theory has long recognized the importance of reinforcement for enhancing behavior. Telling a child that he or she is good or excellent or really smart after completing a task should be reinforcing and promote continuing efforts to engage in that behavior. Moreover, a common belief is that such praise helps to bring about and strengthen intrinsic motivation for accomplishing various goals. To top it off, praise is routinely viewed as an effective way of enhancing a child’s self-esteem, another desirable goal, as our discussion of this concept has suggested.

Yet others have raised serious questions about the effectiveness of frequent praise. The concern is that praise, although a presumably positive source of feedback for a child, is nevertheless a *judgment*. As a consequence, it can lead a child to become increasingly concerned about performing well and to avoid risks (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). In other words, the child may place greater value on receiving the praise at the expense of working autonomously or of learning from one’s own mistakes. Moreover, when given indiscriminately, such as for an easy task, praise may be interpreted by the child as indicating low ability. Thus frequent praise can have the paradoxical effect of lowering motivation and of promoting a kind of *contingent self-worth*, that is, of feeling worthy only when successful (Dweck, 1999).

What Answers Exist? What Questions Remain?

When is praise beneficial to a child? In their summary of the research literature, Henderlong and Lepper (2002) suggest a number of conditions under which some types of praise may have positive consequences for a child. These conditions include praise that is sincere and appropriate; that focuses on the type of effort, strategies, and self-corrections the child initiates in an activity rather than on his or her stable attributes (being good, smart, etc.); that encourages the child to be autonomous in his or her activity rather than serving as a way of controlling behavior; that emphasizes effectiveness in the task rather than social comparison; and that is informative in providing feedback about realistic expectations for the task.

Yet many questions remain about praise as a motivational tool. How could professionals and the public be so convinced of its unbridled value whereas still others have

now come to question its general effects on children's development? Thus controversy continues over what kind of and how frequently praise should be administered. Moreover, virtually all of the research on the consequences of praise has been completed on children in the United States (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). However, cultures differ dramatically in the extent to which children are praised. For example, could its effects on children be very different in a collectivist society in which the emphasis is on improving oneself for the good of the group rather than on self-enhancement? Methodological limitations in the research that has been carried out on this topic present further challenges to some of the conclusions about the effects of praise. Broad acceptance of the value of praise for self-esteem and of its motivational consequences for effort remains controversial and in need of further examination. What kinds of evidence must researchers obtain to decide whether this long-cherished assumption needs to be amended?

Identity

The burgeoning sense of self, along with the capacity to reflect on individual qualities, serves as the nucleus for the construction of an **identity**, a broad, coherent, internalized view of who a person is and what a person wants to be, believes, and values. A sense of identity solidifies and gives meaning to such fundamental questions about self as: Who am I? Why do I exist? What am I to become? The development of a healthy identity, as Erik Erikson pointed out (see the chapter titled "Themes and Theories"), is a lifelong process that builds on earlier gains in accepting and trusting others, in being encouraged to explore interests and desires, and in acquiring feelings of competence and skill. However, it undergoes further important changes during adolescence and early adulthood. By formulating a unified sense of self as an agent separate from others and as someone capable of reflecting on one's own agency, the adolescent creates a more fully integrated identity and sets the stage for developing a healthy personality to accompany the transition to mature adulthood (Blasi & Glodis, 1995). Nevertheless, the stagelike progression in the emergence of identity at this time has been challenged (e.g., Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). For example, alternative conceptualizations place greater emphasis on the view that one's identity is constantly being modified and adjusted as part of an individual's efforts to make sense out of the story of his or her life (Dien, 2000). Despite these differing perspectives, the adolescent period in identity development typically has generated the most interest from researchers.

- **The Adolescent Identity Crisis** The period of adolescence has sometimes been viewed as filled with stress and uncertainty about self, riddled with sudden and frequent mood shifts, a time dubbed the **identity crisis**. Increased conflict with parents and the initiation of more risky and socially disruptive behavior are said to be a part of this developmental period as well (Arnett, 1999).

As they approach the teen years, children frequently engage in new ways of behaving and thinking that involve greater autonomy, independence, and expressions of intimacy with others. For example, teenagers increasingly view their actions and conduct as personal—their own business, so to speak (Smetana, 1988)—and believe that such things as family chores, eating habits, curfews, and personal appearance are up to them, not their parents. Needless to say, this view can introduce conflict within the family, especially for parents who wish to maintain control. Meta-analyses of the findings of numerous studies reveal that the frequency of conflict within the family is greatest early in adolescence and declines over the teenage years (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). For many adolescents, however, conflict is far less frequent than the idea of a crisis would suggest (Hill, 1987; Powers, Hauser, & Kilner, 1989).

KEY THEME

Continuity/Discontinuity

KEY THEME

Child's Active Role

identity (personal) Broad, coherent, internalized view of who a person is and what a person wants to be, believes, and values that emerges during adolescence.

identity crisis Period, usually during adolescence, characterized by considerable uncertainty about the self and the role the individual is to fulfill in society.



Parents are not always enthusiastic about some of the things their children do. During the adolescent years, decisions about dress and appearance are especially common sources of tension within families. However, these efforts to distinguish themselves are typically part of an ordinary developmental process accompanying the transition to mature adulthood and probably reflect the increasing independence young people desire, and may need, in their efforts to construct their own identity.

Mood disruptions are greater during the adolescent years than during other major periods of development (Arnett, 1999). Still, substantial differences among individuals are found here as well. Youth who experience negative life events—that is, who are less popular, are not doing well in school, and are experiencing stress within the family—are especially susceptible to mood shifts (Brooks-Gunn & Warren, 1989; Petersen et al., 1993). In addition, risk-taking behaviors that involve the potential for harm to self and others peak during the late adolescent years, although again substantial individual differences exist in these activities (Arnett, 1999).

One key to successfully negotiating this period appears to be a family, educational environment, and social milieu that support the needs and interests of adolescents (Eccles, Midgley, et al., 1993). For example, as children progress from elementary to junior high school, they find greater emphasis on control and discipline, less positive personal support from teachers, and more competitiveness and public evaluation of their work (Lord et al., 1994). Such changes may conflict with adolescents' need for fewer intellectual pressures and more opportunity to take charge in exploring and resolving uncertainties about their identity (Eccles, Midgley, et al., 1993). From bargaining over their choices of friends and activities to use of the telephone or the family car, adolescents also test new ways of communicating with and relating to parents and others in authority (Powers et al., 1989). Being able to establish a point of view seems to promote a strong sense of personal identity (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Hauser et al., 1987). Parents, teachers, and others play an important role in providing reassurance and support while permitting teenagers to weigh their ideas.

Cultural differences exist in the extent to which storm and stress during adolescence is reported as well (Arnett, 1999). Problems associated with the adolescent years seem to be most severe in Western and other cultures in which greater independence is encouraged and in which the transition from childhood to the adult world is relatively greater. Within the United States less conflict is reported between adolescents

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and adults in Mexican American families than in Caucasian American middle-class families (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1996). Nevertheless, as families assimilate Western culture over generations, the conflict seems to increase. For example, adolescents in those generations of Asian American families who have been in the United States longer are more likely to display greater evidence of characteristics suggestive of an identity crisis (Steinberg, 1996).

● **Ethnic Identity** Among the factors affecting a young person's identity is ethnic and racial background. **Ethnic identity** refers to the sense of belonging to a specific cultural group as opposed to simply adopting its social practices, known more generally as *acculturation* (Phinney, 1990). Because the majority culture often views minority groups in a stereotypical and negative light, identifying with a minority ethnic or racial group was once thought to set the stage for personal conflict and confusion.

Early studies with preschool and younger children reported a bias for choosing dolls or pictures that depict the majority group, in this case Caucasian children, even by members of a minority group (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). But this measure may be methodologically biased, or other factors may be influencing children's choices; the preference has been observed even in the West Indies, where Caucasians are the minority. Other measures sometimes used to assess the value given to one's own racial group have not shown any disadvantage to children with a strong ethnic identity (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). In fact, two large-scale meta-analyses of self-esteem in majority and minority groups in the United States have revealed that self-esteem among African American children and adolescents, especially for girls, is higher than among Caucasians. It does, however, tend to be lower for Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans than for Caucasians among both boys and girls (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002).

Becoming comfortable with one's own ethnic identity can lead to greater acceptance of and a more positive attitude toward other ethnic groups (Phinney, Ferguson, & Tate, 1997; Valk, 2000). Valuing one's ethnicity seems to be fostered by responsive parents who are sensitive to ethnic issues (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). However, ethnic socialization for minority parents is carried out within, not at the expense of, broader child-rearing goals emphasized in most families: getting a good education, being a good human being, feeling satisfied about oneself, working hard, and so forth (Marshall, 1995).

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What are the primary distinctions between self as object and self as subject? What are typical behaviors that illustrate these two characterizations of self?
- When do various aspects of self-concept appear, and what developmental transitions do they undergo? Distinguish between categorical self, social comparison, and the adolescent basis for self.
- How does effectance motivation begin and develop? What factors contribute to a mastery orientation and to learned helplessness? What steps can parents and teachers take to reduce learned helplessness?
- What contributes to high self-esteem and how do social and cultural differences influence it?
- What role does praise play in self-esteem and in promoting an achievement orientation?
- When is a child likely to develop a broad and coherent concept of self? What is an identity crisis? How important is ethnic identity for young people?

ethnic identity The sense of belonging to a particular cultural group.

Self-regulation and Self-control

Impulsive and easily upset, infants and young children have difficulty behaving in a patient or deliberate manner. Eventually, however, parents and others demand that children acquire *effortful control*, the ability to suppress undesirable responses for less dominant ones that are considered socially or morally more acceptable. A three-year-old needs to stay away from an attractive fireplace, use the toilet, say thank you, and share and put away toys. Older children and teenagers assume ever greater responsibility for their actions and are expected to conform to socially accepted rules and standards. But becoming responsible and self-reliant can be a long and difficult transition. A mother may have great difficulty persuading her daughter, who is eager to show off her tricycle-riding prowess, that it is a playmate's turn. And countless parents have wrestled with how best to convince their children that completing their homework is an important way to prepare themselves for future success.

Self-regulation refers to the capacity to monitor and direct one's activities to achieve certain goals or meet the demands imposed by others. **Self-control**, a related concept, is the ability to comply with expectations of caregivers or other adults, especially in their absence. Both are important for instilling a sense of self and for achieving ethical and moral behavior.

Developmental Changes

For infants and young children, regulation of behavior might best be labeled *co-regulation* (Kopp, 1987) because children and their caregivers jointly manage behavior. In many families, efforts to limit activities begin when babies are about eight or nine months old. At this time, newly acquired motor skills increase risk of injury, heralding the need for restraining devices such as playpens and gates. Infants about one year of age may be warned to avoid dangerous or health-threatening objects and situations ("Don't touch the knife"; "Don't play with the cat litter"; "Hold on to my hand"). Efforts to preserve possessions ("Stay away from the VCR") and avoid harm to others ("Don't pinch") are also common concerns at about this time (Gralinski & Kopp, 1993).

As toddlers move beyond eighteen months of age, adults often supplement these *caregiving demands* with additional *demands for appropriate behavior*, such as keeping quiet and sitting up straight, and *demands for competent action*, such as helping to set the table or participating in social and family activities (Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1995). These efforts focus on encouraging acceptable social interactions, taking part in family routines and chores, and cultivating self-care and greater independence (e.g., walking rather than being carried) (Gralinski & Kopp, 1993). By the time children reach twenty-four to thirty months of age, parental demands may decline in frequency as children become familiar with and respond to requests more routinely (Kopp, 1987). Nevertheless, the frequency with which conflict occurs between parents and children in American families—for example, asking the child to delay a response, slow down an activity, stop an unacceptable behavior, pay attention, or help out with an uninteresting task—is typically still high, perhaps on the order of fifteen to twenty times per hour (Laible & Thompson, 2002). The commitment to comply with a "don't" uttered by caregivers appears to be acquired somewhat earlier and more rapidly by children in American families than consistency in responding to a "do." This difference may be due to parents' enforcement of the former more often than the latter or to their greater persistence in prohibiting negative behaviors, thus promoting more fear in children about initiating (or continuing to produce) these behaviors (Kochanska, 2002; Kochanska, Coy, & Murray, 2001). Girls also tend to be more compliant than boys (Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000).

Young children who are best able to engage in effortful control of behavior as toddlers are more effective in focusing and sustaining their attention to a task as early as



Toddlers are often asked to begin to regulate behaviors so that they are displayed in socially acceptable ways. One such activity that most toddlers are expected to master is control of body functions. Although it can be a stressful practice, this toddler has found a way to make "potty training" a more positive experience.

self-regulation Process by which children come to control their own behaviors in accordance with the standards of their caregivers and community, especially in the absence of other adults.

self-control Ability to comply with sociocultural prescriptions concerning ethical or moral behavior.

twelve months of age. In addition, caregivers who are supportive, responsive, accepting, sensitive, and emotionally available to their toddlers, who are able to justify to their children the need for children to act in certain ways, and who can point out the consequences of their youngsters' behaviors, offer a compromise or provide a benefit for alternative responses, and include positive or negative evaluations of their children's deeds are likely to have offspring who display more socially acceptable and compliant behaviors later in development (Kochanska et al., 2001; Laible & Thompson, 2002). Moreover, when mothers emphasize "do" over "don't" and behaving competently over inhibiting activities in their toddlers and preschoolers, fewer compliance and behavior problems arise at age five (Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1995).

KEY THEME**Child's Active Role**

Children's self-initiated attempts to obey appear during the second year. A thirteen-month-old, for example, may look at, and perhaps even approach and touch, an electrical outlet while saying, "No, no!" Over the next few years, self-restraint improves rapidly. For example, in a **delay-of-gratification** task, in which the child is asked to wait some period of time before performing an activity or attaining some highly desired outcome (such as playing with an attractive toy or eating a piece of candy), eighteen-month-olds have great difficulty complying. Between two and three years of age, children become increasingly more effective in delaying their behavior (Vaughn, Kopp, & Krakow, 1984). Thus, although self-control begins with attempts by others to govern the young child's actions, their efforts are transferred and gradually relinquished as warnings and guidance become less direct and as the child takes on more responsibility for regulating his behavior. How does this shift come about?

The Influence of Language and Attention

KEY THEME**Interaction Among Domains**

As we have just seen, both attentional factors and the communication pattern of the caregiver seem to be important components in facilitating compliance in children. Both also appear to be critical elements in the child's ability to regulate his or her own behavior without the assistance of an adult. As we learned in the chapter titled "Language," Lev Vygotsky (1962) and his students, particularly Alexander Luria (1961, 1969), theorized that language plays a pivotal role in behavioral regulation. A preschool child, for example, may engage in the expression of *private speech*, speech intended for no one else but that helps to direct attention to key dimensions and features of a task, to assist in establishing and organizing ways to carry out an activity, and to preserve important task-related information in memory (Meichenbaum, 1977). Yet children's observable private speech is not always correlated with effective problem solving. Perhaps this finding should be expected, as the production of private speech is more likely in especially challenging circumstances (Frauenglass & Diaz, 1985). Preschoolers at risk for behavior problems, however, tend to produce more spontaneous private speech than those who are not at risk. This finding raises the interesting possibility that the failure to progress from overt speech-for-self to internalized speech-for-self may contribute to greater risk for behavioral problems in some children (Winsler et al., 2000).

Attentional factors also seem important. For example, the child directed not to eat a marshmallow who says, "The marshmallow is yummy"—words that focus attention on the forbidden treat—or who talks about sad things such as falling and hurting himself—ideas that provide little diversion—shows less ability to inhibit his behavior than someone who sings a pleasant but distracting nursery rhyme such as "Three Blind Mice" (Mischel, Ebbesen, & Zeiss, 1972). A fidgety third-grader eager for recess might be better advised to direct her attention to reading a book of her choice rather than staring at the classroom clock. In fact, the more a child attends to a desired object, the more difficult it is to endure a continuing delay (Peake, Hebl, & Mischel, 2002).

For very young children, caregivers are more likely to initiate attempts to focus or distract the child. To illustrate this point, George Holden (1983) observed mothers and their two-and-a-half-year-olds as they completed grocery shopping, an activity

delay of gratification

Capacity to wait before performing a tempting activity or attaining some highly desired outcome; a measure of ability to regulate one's own behavior.

that can test the limits of most caregivers because grocery displays are enticing. In this setting, mothers were frequently forced to respond to their children's requests and used a variety of tactics to do so: reasoning, not responding, physically or verbally intervening, acknowledging children's desires, and attempting to distract children. Mothers who tried to anticipate conflicts, either by diverting children's attention in advance or by engaging them in an interesting conversation, were most effective in preventing conflict while grocery shopping. Sensitive and consistent mothers who learned to use strategies to direct, maintain, and redirect their children's attention appeared to be most successful in regulating their behavior (Holden & West, 1989; Kopp, 1987).

During the later preschool and early school years, children display their own attentional strategies to keep on track and support their goals. For example, in a delay-of-gratification task, preschoolers often place a tempting reward in front of themselves rather than a picture of it or some other, irrelevant item. In doing so, they increase their exposure to the forbidden object, look at it more, and have greater difficulty delaying their response to it. By age five, children are less likely to create such self-defeating arrangements. They prefer to wait with the tempting reward covered rather than uncovered (Mischel & Mischel, 1983). Some will even shield their eyes, play games with their hands and feet, or try to go to sleep to help manage the delay (Cournoyer & Trudel, 1991; Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989).

Older children show greater metacognitive understanding of helpful attentional and other tactics for regulating their activities (Holtz & Lehman, 1995; Mischel & Mischel, 1983). An eleven-year-old, for example, offered the following recommendation for distracting oneself: "You can take your mind off of it and think of Christmas or something like that. But the point is, think about something else." By this age, then, children have begun to reflect on ways they can most effectively control their behavior. The Development of Self and Self-regulation chronology summarizes major aspects of transitions in this ability, along with accomplishments in the development of self.

Individual Differences

Even ten years later, those who at two years of age more successfully inhibited responses to attractive objects are better than other children at sustaining a goal and resisting distractions in order to complete a problem-solving task (Silverman & Ippolito, 1997). Adolescents who have greater self-regulatory capacities as preschoolers are described by their parents as more academically and socially competent and better able to handle frustration and temptation. They also are reported to be more attentive, deliberate, and intelligent and seem better able to tolerate stress and cope with social and personal problems, even when their intellectual performance is similar to peers less able to delay gratification (Mischel et al., 1989; Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990).

Jeanne Block and Jack Block (1980) have identified yet another component of self-regulation, flexible and adaptive behavior in appropriate settings, that shows evidence of stable individual differences. Shouting, running, and responding impulsively, for example, may be unacceptable within the classroom but highly appropriate during recess. Some children display elasticity and are able to modify their behavior easily as the situation demands throughout childhood; others consistently show far less flexibility.

What accounts for these individual differences? Genetic factors may contribute, but researchers generally agree that socialization practices also play a significant role. Caregivers who encourage and use self-regulation provide opportunities for children to acquire skills, attitudes, and habits that promote persistence and effort and reduce frustration, yielding both social and academic benefits (Mischel et al., 1989). Parents also need to strike a proper balance between dispensing control and encouraging self-regulation. Overcontrolling adults tend to have grown up in families whose values emphasize considerable structure, order, and tradition (Block, 1971). Adults with

KEY THEME

Child's Active Role

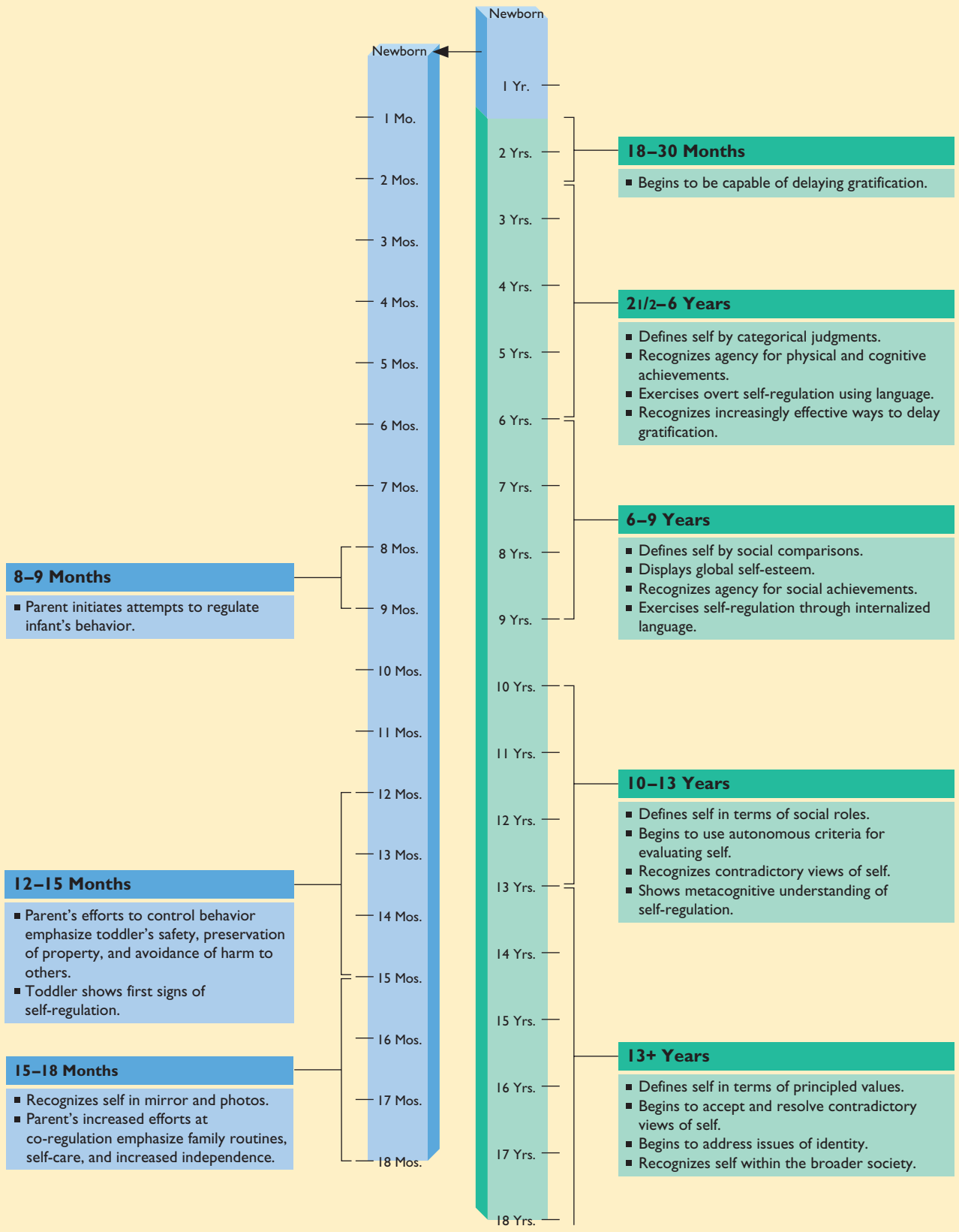
KEY THEME

Individual Differences

KEY THEME

Nature/Nurture

CHRONOLOGY: *Development of Self and Self-regulation*



This chart describes the sequence in the development of understanding the self and self-regulation based on the findings of research. Children often show individual differences in the exact ages at which they display the various developmental achievements outlined here.

relatively little control, on the other hand, tend to have grown up in families that placed little emphasis on achievement and responsible behavior and in which each parent had different caregiving values.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What is the difference between self-regulation and self-control?
- How does compliant behavior change over development? What factors seem to promote it?
- What role do attentional and language processes play in delay of gratification?
- How stable are individual differences in self-regulation?

Moral Development

As children gain increasing knowledge of the self and greater skill in regulating their own behavior, they are expected to increasingly conform to the socially acceptable rules and regulations of their community. Theories of *moral development*, the process by which an individual comes to understand what society accepts as right and wrong, differ enormously in explaining how this change comes about.

Freud's Theory

Freud's theory focuses on *affective* dimensions of moral development. According to his perspective, the emotional relationships children have with their parents influence the degree to which they incorporate parental standards of conduct. Children *internalize* the standards of the parent as a by-product of the child's progression through the stages of psychosexual development. Freud believed a moral sense emerges near the end of the *phallic stage*, around age five or six years, when boys resolve the *Oedipal complex*. According to Freud, the boy experiences intense emotional conflict when his sexual attraction to his mother cannot be fulfilled and he comes to fear castration by his father (his competitor for his mother's affections).

The Oedipal conflict becomes resolved, Freud concluded, when the young boy suppresses his instinctual urges and allies himself with his powerful same-sex parent, his father. Through this process of *identification*, the child acquires his father's moral values and standards. The outcome is the formation of the **superego**, the component of the child's personality that functions both as a **conscience** (governing what not to do) and an **ego ideal** (governing appropriate and desirable behaviors). By acting in accordance with his parents' wishes, the child avoids feelings of guilt associated with violating these newly internalized values and standards.

Among the controversial aspects of Freud's theory is its prediction that girls will develop a weaker moral sense than boys (Turiel, 1998). In the counterpart to the Oedipal complex, dubbed the *Electra complex*, daughters experience a strong attachment to their fathers. However, because they cannot fear castration, the resolution of this conflict involves far less emotional intensity for girls than it does for boys. As a result, a girl's identification with her mother occurs with less force, and the superego or conscience, according to Freud, is not as strong.

Attempts to validate the various claims made by Freud have not met with great success. In fact, girls tend to display more guilt than boys (Kochanska et al., 2002). Moreover, positive emotional relationships and mutual responsiveness between mother and child are closely aligned with willingness to complete an assigned task and with a healthy conscience for *both* boys and girls (Kochanska, Aksan, & Koenig, 1995; Kochanska & Murray, 2000). The notion that moral development is inferior or incomplete in girls has been highly criticized for other reasons as well. For example, Carol Gilligan (1982) maintains that Freud's theory is a male's view of male

KEY THEME

Continuity/Discontinuity

superego In Freudian theory, a mental structure that monitors socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

conscience In Freudian theory, the part of the superego that defines unacceptable behaviors and actions, usually as also defined by the parents.

ego ideal In Freudian theory, the part of the superego that defines the positive standards for which an individual strives; acquired via parental rewarding of desired behaviors.

This young girl reflects on a transgression after being sent to her room. Research on moral development and the development of values has examined the roles of affect, reinforcement and punishment, and cognition in efforts to fully understand the socialization of culturally permissible behavior. All of these factors may play a part in the acquisition of behaviors that are considered socially acceptable and desirable in the community.



development that fails to explore the unique dimensions of the female experience as it pertains to morality.

Contemporary research also shows that children begin to develop a conscience well before the age at which Freud claimed the superego emerges. Early internalization of rules and an appreciation for right and wrong seem to arise in the child's second year of life, perhaps as the ability to recognize positive emotional reactions as well as anger or displeasure in the communications of caregivers and to regulate and inhibit behavior increases (Kochanska, 2002; Kochanska, Murray, & Coy, 1997; Kochanska, Tjebkes, & Forman, 1998). By age three years, some children willingly comply with the requests of their parents to complete certain activities (e.g., putting away toys) and avoid others (e.g., touching prohibited objects), even when the parents are no longer present (Kochanska, Aksan, & Koenig, 1995). Three-year-olds also notice flawed objects (e.g., a teddy bear with stuffing coming out or a broken cup), and, if led to believe the flaws are the consequence of their own behavior, they may voice apologies ("Sorry," "Didn't mean to"), offer reparations ("Put back in," "Clean up"), and exhibit distress ("Take this away," "I wanna go"), expressions of guilt and shame that are frequently manifestations of conscience (Kochanska, Casey, & Fukumoto, 1995). Thus the particulars of Freud's theory of moral development have failed to receive support. Nevertheless, his ideas about the internalization of society's standards, the central role of parents in the process, and the importance of the child's emotions for moral development have endured.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theories emphasize the child's acquisition of *moral behaviors*, such as behaving acceptably and resisting temptation. According to social learning theory, the rewards and punishments dispensed by parents and others shape the child's conduct, as do the actions and verbalizations a child sees parents and others use. In this sense, moral values are learned just as any other behavior. Social learning theorists see morality as a process of incremental growth in appropriate actions and increasing conformity with the rules of society.

How convincingly does the social learning model explain moral development? Studies investigating the child's ability to resist temptation—for example, learning not to play with a forbidden toy—suggest that reinforcement history is indeed a factor in moral behavior. Children quickly learn not to touch an attractive toy if an

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Nature/Nurture

adult mildly reprimands them for initiating activities with it. In other words, they respond to the punishments the adult doles out.

Several factors influence children's tendency to transgress when left alone in the room with a forbidden toy after they have been punished. First, as social learning theory predicts, the timing of the punishment plays a role. Punishments are most effective if they closely follow the undesired behavior—for example, when the child first reaches for a forbidden toy rather than after he has picked it up. Second, providing a verbal explanation of why the toy is prohibited also has an effect. When children are told, for example, that the attractive toy might break if it is handled, they are much less likely to violate the adult's prohibition. According to social learning theorists, verbalizations facilitate the internalization of morally acceptable and unacceptable behaviors (Aronfreed, 1976).

Parents and others also serve as models. Children who observe a model commit a prohibited act, such as touching a forbidden toy, are more likely to perform the act themselves, whereas children observing a model who resists temptation will commit fewer transgressions (Rosenkoetter, 1973). However, models appear to be more powerful in *disinhibiting* than in inhibiting behavior that violates a rule or an expectation. Children are more likely to follow someone's deviant behaviors than his or her compliant ones (Hoffman, 1970).

Newer versions of social learning theory assign a larger role to cognitive processes in the emergence of moral values. In Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), children develop internalized standards of conduct, cognitive representations derived from observing others and processing their explanations for moral behavior. Children, especially to the extent to which they accept and accurately perceive communications, attempt to behave in ways consistent with those representations (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Nevertheless, describing changes in the child's ability to reason about moral questions has been left largely to other theorists, such as Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg.

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Cognitive-Developmental Theories

Cognitive-developmental explanations of moral development highlight the ways children *reason* about moral problems. Should a person ever steal, even if the transgression would help another person? Are there circumstances under which lying is acceptable? The child's capacity to think through the answers to such questions depends on his ability to consider the perspectives, needs, and feelings of others. In other words, moral development is intimately connected with advances in general thinking abilities. The two most prominent cognitive-developmental theorists concerned with moral development, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, have suggested stage theories in which children's reasoning about moral issues is qualitatively different depending on their level of development.

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Interaction Among Domains

KEY THEME

Continuity/Discontinuity

● **Piaget's Theory** Piaget (1932/1965) derived many of his ideas about moral development from two contexts: as children played a formal game with a shared set of rules and as they encountered moral dilemmas created to assess thinking about ethical problems. For example, Piaget observed and interviewed children playing marbles, a popular children's game. Children were asked questions about this game: What are the rules? Can new rules be invented? Where do rules come from? Have they always been the same?

Preschoolers, Piaget stated, are not guided by rules. They engage in the activity for the pure pleasure it provides, and their play is largely solitary. Thus young children may hide marbles or throw them randomly, ignoring the formal rules of the game. By about age six, however, children come to regard rules as sacred and inviolable. Rules, handed down by adults, must be respected and have always existed in the same form; people played marbles in exactly the same way over the years. By about ten years of age, children understand rules to be the result of cooperation and mutual

consent among all the participants in the game. Thus rules may be modified to suit the needs of the situation if all the players agree.

The second method Piaget used to study moral development consisted of noting responses of children to moral dilemmas, stories in which a central character committed a transgression. The intentions of that character and the consequences of his or her act varied, as the following stories illustrate:

- A. *A little boy who is called John is in his room. He is called to dinner. He goes into the dining room. But behind the door there was a chair, and on the chair there was a tray with fifteen cups on it. John couldn't have known that there was all this behind the door. He goes in, the door knocks against the tray, bang go the fifteen cups, and they all get broken!*
- B. *Once there was a little boy whose name was Henry. One day when his mother was out he tried to get some jam out of the cupboard. He climbed up onto a chair and stretched out his arm. But the jam was too high up and he couldn't reach it and have any. But while he was trying to get it he knocked over a cup. The cup fell down and broke. (Piaget, 1932/1965, p. 122)*

Which boy is naughtier? Younger children typically choose John, the child who broke more cups. According to Piaget, children younger than about ten are in the stage of moral development called **moral realism**, or *heteronomy*. They judge the rightness or wrongness of an act by the objective visible consequences—in this case, how many cups were broken. They do not consider the boys' intentions to behave well or improperly.

In the stage of moral realism, rules are viewed as unbreakable; if the rules are violated, the child sees punishment as the inevitable consequence. The belief in **immanent justice** is reflected in such statements as “That’s God punishing me,” made when the child accidentally falls off a bike after lying to her mother, for example. Although the fall is unrelated to the child’s transgression, she believes the causal link exists. Children in this stage also believe that a punishment need not be related to the wrongful act if it is severe enough to teach a lesson. Thus stealing a friend’s toy can be punished by any means, not necessarily by returning the toy or making reparations.

From a limited ability to reason about moral issues, children progress to **moral relativism**, or *autonomy*. Now the transgressor’s motives are taken into account. Thus, Henry is named as the naughtier boy. In addition, the child no longer believes every violation will be punished. Punishments, however, should relate to the misdemeanor so that the individual appreciates the consequences of his act.

What precipitates the shift from moral realism to moral relativism? Piaget points to changes in the child’s cognitive capabilities, especially decreasing egocentrism (see the chapter titled “Cognition: Piaget and Vygotsky”), as one important element. To understand another’s intentions, for example, the child must be able to appreciate the point of view of that person as distinct from her own. Another important factor is the opportunity to interact with peers. Peer interactions force the child to consider the thoughts and feelings of others and eventually lead to an understanding of their intentions and motives. Parents can further promote the shift from realism to relativism, notes Piaget, by encouraging mutual respect and understanding, pointing out the consequences of the child’s actions for others and articulating their needs and feelings as parents.

● **Evaluating Piaget** How well does Piaget’s theory stand up? Research confirms that reasoning about moral problems shifts as children grow older. With development children from diverse cultures, from different social classes, and of varying intellectual abilities more fully consider intentions in judging the actions of another person. Nevertheless, young children also can be sensitive to the intentions behind a given act (Zelazo, Helwig, & Lau, 1996). In addition, as early as the preschool years,

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moral realism In Piaget’s theory of moral development, the first stage of moral reasoning, in which moral judgments are made on the basis of the consequences of an act. Also called *heteronomy*.

immanent justice Young child’s belief that punishment will inevitably follow a transgression.

moral relativism In Piaget’s theory of moral development, the second stage of moral reasoning, in which moral judgments are made on the basis of the actor’s intentions. Also called *autonomy*.

children recognize that actions that produce harmful psychological consequences (e.g., causing embarrassment, frightening another person) are as unacceptable as behaviors that produce physical harm (Helwig, Zelazo, & Wilson, 2001). As Piaget described, beliefs in immanent justice and arbitrary punishment decline with age (Hoffman, 1970; Lickona, 1976). Moreover, as children reach the stage of concrete operations, become less egocentric, and demonstrate improved ability to take the perspective of another, they are more likely to recommend punishment appropriate to the moral transgression (Lee, 1971). However, the manner in which *both* parents and peers reason with younger children influences the level of reasoning the children display concerning moral conflicts later in their development (Walker, Hennig, & Krettenauer, 2000). In other words, parents and not just peers (as Piaget claimed), have a significant impact on moral reasoning.

It is clear from Piaget's work that the child's conceptualization of what is moral becomes more elaborate and complex with age and that any attempt to understand moral development must include an explanation of the child's thought as well as behavior. Subsequent theorists, Lawrence Kohlberg in particular, have found Piaget's writings a useful springboard for their own theoretical formulations.

- **Kohlberg's Theory** Like Piaget, Kohlberg (1969, 1976) proposed a stage theory of moral development in which progress through each stage proceeds in a universal order and regression to earlier modes of thinking is rare. Kohlberg based his theory on children's responses to a set of dilemmas that put obedience to authority or the law in direct conflict with helping a person in need (e.g., "Should a man steal an overpriced drug that he cannot obtain legally in order to save his wife?").

Using an analysis of the reasoning of boys ranging in age from ten to sixteen, Kohlberg identified three general levels of moral orientation, each with two sub-stages, to explain the varying responses of his participants (see Table 12.1). At the **preconventional level** the child's behavior is motivated by external pressures: avoidance of punishment, attainment of rewards, and preservation of self-interests. Norms of behavior are not yet derived from internalized principles, and the child's needs and desires are primary. At the **conventional level** conforming to the norms of the majority and maintaining the social order have become central to the child's reasoning. The child now considers the points of view of others, along with their intentions and motives. The child also feels a sense of responsibility to contribute to society and to uphold the laws and institutions that serve its members. Finally, at the **postconventional level** the individual has developed a fuller understanding of the basis for laws and rules. They are now seen as a social contract that all individuals must uphold because of shared responsibilities and duties. The individual recognizes the relative and sometimes arbitrary nature of rules, which may vary from group to group. Certain principles and values, in particular justice and human dignity, must be preserved at all costs. Kohlberg emphasized that changes in the child's perspective-taking ability are the basis for shifts in moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg, changes in perspective-taking ability are promoted by opportunities for children to discuss others' points of view, a position for which research provides some support (Walker et al., 2000).

- **Evaluating Kohlberg** Numerous investigations of Kohlberg's theory have confirmed stagelike transitions in moral reasoning. For example, Anne Colby and her colleagues (1983) followed Kohlberg's original sample of adolescent boys during a twenty-year period and noted that their responses to moral dilemmas fit within the developmental stages delineated by Kohlberg (see Figure 12.5). With few exceptions, participants progressed upward. Six- through fifteen-year-olds tested during a two-year period gained in moral reasoning and few children skipped stages or regressed to earlier forms of reasoning (Walker, 1989). Children also judge the sophistication of alternative responses to moral dilemmas in accordance with stage theory, as long as the alternatives are below their current level of reasoning about moral development (Boom, Brugman & van der Heijden, 2001).

KEY THEME

Continuity/Discontinuity

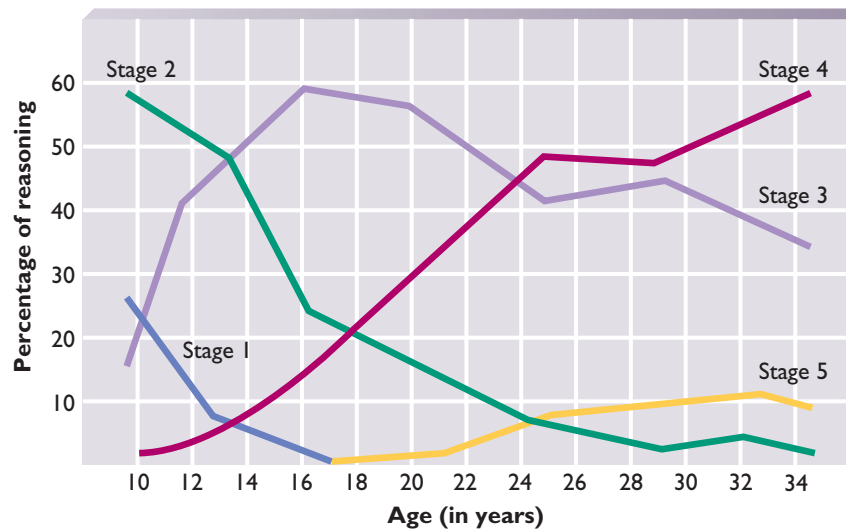
preconventional level In Kohlberg's theory, the first level of moral reasoning, in which morality is motivated by the avoidance of punishments and attainment of rewards.

conventional level In Kohlberg's theory, the second level of moral reasoning, in which the child conforms to the norms of the majority and wishes to preserve the social order.

postconventional level In Kohlberg's theory, the third level of moral reasoning, in which laws are seen as the result of a social contract and individual principles of conscience may emerge.

TABLE 12.1 Kohlberg's Six Substages of Moral Development

Stage	Motivation	Typical Moral Reasoning
Preconventional Level		
1 Punishment and obedience orientation	The primary motive for action is the avoidance of punishment:	<i>Pro:</i> If you let your wife die, you will get in trouble. You'll be blamed for not spending the money to save her and there'll be an investigation of you and the druggist for your wife's death. <i>Con:</i> You shouldn't steal the drug because you'll be caught and sent to jail if you do. If you do get away, your conscience would bother you thinking how the police would catch up to you any minute. (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 52)
2 Naive instrumental hedonism	Actions are motivated by the desire for rewards:	<i>Pro:</i> If you do happen to get caught you could give the drug back and you wouldn't get much of a sentence. It wouldn't bother you much to serve a little jail term, if you have your wife when you get out. <i>Con:</i> He may not get much of a jail term if he steals the drug, but his wife will probably die before he gets out, so it wouldn't do him much good. If his wife dies, he shouldn't blame himself; it isn't his fault she has cancer. (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 52)
Conventional Level		
3 Good-boy morality	The child strives to avoid the disapproval of others (as distinct from avoidance of punishment):	<i>Pro:</i> No one will think you're bad if you steal the drug but your family will think you're an inhuman husband if you don't. If you let your wife die, you'll never be able to look anyone in the face again. <i>Con:</i> It isn't just the druggist who will think you're a criminal, everyone else will, too. After you steal it, you'll feel bad thinking how you've brought dishonor on your family and yourself; you won't be able to face anyone again. (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 52)
4 Authority-maintaining morality	An act is always wrong if it violates a rule or does harm to others:	<i>Pro:</i> You should steal it. If you did nothing you'd be letting your wife die, it's your responsibility if she dies. You have to take it with the idea of paying the druggist. <i>Con:</i> It is a natural thing. . . to want to save his wife but it's always wrong to steal. He still knows he's stealing and taking a valuable drug from the man who made it. (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 50)
Postconventional Level		
5 Morality of contract and democracy	The individual is concerned with self-respect and maintaining the respect of others. Laws must be obeyed, because they represent a social contract, but they may sometimes conflict with moral values:	<i>Pro:</i> The law wasn't set up for these circumstances. Taking the drug in this situation isn't really right, but it's justified to do it. <i>Con:</i> You can't completely blame someone for stealing, but extreme circumstances don't really justify taking the law in your own hands. You can't have everyone stealing when they get desperate. The end may be good, but the ends don't justify the means. (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 50)
6 Morality of individual principles of conscience	Individuals are concerned with upholding their personal principles and may sometimes feel it necessary to deviate from rules when the rules conflict with moral principles:	<i>Pro:</i> This is a situation that forces him to choose between stealing and letting his wife die. In a situation in which the choice must be made, it is morally right to steal. He has to act in terms of the principle of preserving and respecting life. <i>Con:</i> [The man] is faced with the decision of whether to consider other people who need the drug just as badly as his wife. [He] ought to act not according to his particular feelings toward his wife but considering the value of all the lives involved. (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 51)



Source: Adapted from Colby et al., 1983.

Cross-cultural studies in countries as diverse as India, Turkey, Japan, Nigeria, and Finland also have found that children show development of moral reasoning, from pre-conventional to conventional levels, without skipping stages and without regressing to previous stages. However, most individuals as adults still reason at the conventional level (see Figure 12.5). The highest level of moral maturity, what might be termed *moral excellence*, the kind, for example, displayed by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or Abraham Lincoln, probably requires more than postconventional reasoning about moral dilemmas. Such reasoning very likely must combine with high standards, a responsive conscience, a strong sense of personal agency and understanding of one's place in society, a sensitive and compassionate concern about others, and a willingness to act on one's convictions (Colby & Damon, 1992; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Walker & Pitts, 1998).

Moral development has been found to correlate positively with IQ and educational level, consistent with Kohlberg's emphasis on the cognitive basis of moral judgment. As with Piaget's theory, however, researchers have been unable to confirm some specific propositions in Kohlberg's outline of moral development. For example, do individuals within a stage respond consistently to different moral dilemmas, as Kohlberg maintains they should? In one study of seventy-five college students who responded to five moral dilemmas, not one person received the same stage score for all stories (Fishkin, Keniston, & MacKinnon, 1973). Thus, although individuals may exhibit a particular stage, they also display considerable variation in their reasoning about moral issues.

A major criticism of Kohlberg's theory is that it fails to capture the many modes of moral reasoning evident in individuals and different cultural groups. In responding to moral dilemmas, people growing up on the Israeli kibbutz often address the importance of the principle of happiness for everyone (Snarey, 1985). Asian cultures are more likely to emphasize the idea of the collective good and a harmonious social order than Western cultures. From this perspective, the desirable way to resolve disputes is to reconcile people who are in conflict rather than rely on laws to control their behavior. Thus families often preserve harmony by holding conferences to settle disputes. Kohlberg's moral dilemmas, which require a choice between rules and the needs of individuals to bring about justice, do not permit the expression of this cultural principle (Dien, 1982; Ma & Cheung, 1996). Evaluations of the appropriateness of telling the truth or lying also differ between Chinese and Canadian children, as might be predicted from the differing emphasis on modesty and humility reported for these two cultures (Lee et al., 1997). Likewise, Indian cultures emphasize the value of all life, not just human life; thus a most serious transgression, as expressed by

FIGURE 12.5

The Development of Moral Reasoning

In a longitudinal follow-up study of Kohlberg's original sample, Anne Colby and her colleagues confirmed that participants showed consistent upward advances in moral reasoning with age. The graph shows the extent to which participants gave responses characteristic of each of Kohlberg's six stages from age ten through adulthood. With development, responses associated with the pre-conventional level (stages 1 and 2) declined, and responses associated with the conventional level (stages 3 and 4) increased. Few young adults moved to the postconventional level of moral reasoning.

KEY THEME

Sociocultural Influence

Kohlberg's theory of moral development has been criticized for failing to measure the values found in other cultures. Until researchers have a greater understanding of cultural values, such as those being conveyed by this mother in Somalia as she assists her children in studying the Koran, our understanding of the development of moral reasoning will remain incomplete.



orthodox Hindu children and adults, is eating beef, chicken, or fish (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). Such a concept does not appear in Kohlberg's outline of moral development. Buddhist beliefs about limits to self and to the value of intervention in preventing suffering are also difficult to reconcile within Kohlberg's framework (Huebner & Garrod, 1991). Thus the movement of the individual toward the fullest understanding of the principle of justice, at least as conceptualized by Kohlberg, may be a singularly Western phenomenon.

The failure to consider alternative modes of moral reasoning has been an especially sensitive issue with respect to possible sex differences in moral development. In one early study, Kohlberg reported that most males function at the higher stage, whereas most females reason at the lower stage, within the conventional level of moral reasoning (Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969). The report provoked a strong reaction from some members of the psychological community and led Carol Gilligan to propose that moral development takes a different, not an inferior, course in females (Gilligan, 1982, 1988; Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988). Gilligan states that because females tend to be concerned with relationships, caregiving, and intimacy, they typically develop a **morality of care and responsibility** in contrast to the **morality of justice** described by Kohlberg. The morality of care and responsibility concerns self-sacrifice and relationships with others rather than the tension between rules and the needs and rights of the individual.

An eleven-year-old girl's response to the story about whether or not to steal a drug illustrates the ethic of care that Gilligan holds to be typical of females:

If he stole the drug, he might save his wife then, but if he did, he might have to go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn't get more of the drug, and it might not be good. So, they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 28)

Although this girl's response might receive a low score in Kohlberg's system because of its seemingly wavering noncommittal nature, Gilligan believes it reflects a mature understanding of the crisis a relationship might undergo when a law is broken.

Are there sex differences in moral development? Of the large number of investigations based on Kohlberg's tasks, very few report substantial differences between males and females (Walker, 1984, 1991; Wark & Krebs, 1996). Both males and females tend to interpret moral decisions about impersonal situations (such as whether a man should steal a drug for his wife) in terms of justice and rights; decisions about dilemmas that they have personally confronted are more frequently made in terms of

morality of care and responsibility Tendency to make moral judgments on the basis of concern for others.

morality of justice Tendency to make moral judgments on the basis of reason and abstract principles of equity.

the ethic of care (Walker, 1996). Regardless of whether sex differences in moral development exist, Gilligan's work has shown that researchers need to expand their understanding of what constitutes moral values.

● **Morality as Domain-specific Knowledge** As we have just seen, definitions of morality can vary enormously and are often embedded within the broad fabric of social knowledge and values represented in culture (Turiel & Wainryb, 1994; Turiel, 1998). But perhaps a distinction needs to be made between moral and societal beliefs. The *moral domain* consists of rules that regulate a person's own or another's rights or welfare; examples are the concepts of justice and responsibility toward others. The *societal domain* pertains to knowledge of **social conventions**, the rules that regulate social interactions such as how to dress appropriately for a given occasion and what degree of formality to use in speaking to someone, factors that can vary dramatically from one culture to another.

Elliot Turiel (1983) hypothesizes that the moral and societal domains develop along separate paths and that most theories of moral development have confused the two. Children begin distinguishing moral and social-conventional rules by age three (Smetana & Braeges, 1990). To illustrate, preschoolers will respond differently to transgressions of their playmates depending on whether the actions violate a social or a moral rule. When a child violates a moral rule, for example, by intentionally inflicting harm or taking another's possessions, other children typically react by physically intervening or making statements about the pain the victim experienced. On the other hand, when children observe another person violating a social convention, such as eating while standing instead of sitting, they either do not react or simply comment on the rules surrounding proper social behavior (Nucci & Turiel, 1978). In addition, when questioned about social-conventional transgressions, most children say such an act would be acceptable if no rule existed about it in school, whereas moral transgressions are wrong, are more serious, and should receive greater punishment, even if the school has no rule pertaining to them (Smetana, Schlagman, & Adams, 1993). Children and adolescents are also likely to be relatively intolerant about others holding moral beliefs with which they disagree but readily recognize that others need not share beliefs about social conventions (Wainryb et al., 2001). Moreover, disagreements with parents are far more likely to emerge with respect to social conventions than moral values as children move into and through adolescence in many different cultures (Smetana, 2002).

How do children come to appreciate the distinction between moral and social conventions? Perhaps through the greater emotional affect associated with moral transgressions than with social infractions. When a child observes a peer hitting someone or is a victim of retaliation himself, the abuse may arouse a high degree of emotion in him. For example, when first- and third-graders are asked to rate how they would feel if they were hit without provocation or if another child stole their toys, they are more likely to indicate a negative emotion than when they line up outside the wrong classroom. Furthermore, children frequently justify intervening in a moral transgression by referring to their own or the victim's emotional state (Arsenio & Ford, 1985). In addition, adults may react differently to transgressions associated with moral issues compared with social conventions; as a result, the child learns to discriminate between these two domains (Glassman & Zan, 1995).

● **Evaluating Cognitive-Developmental Theories** Cognitive-developmental approaches fill a void left by Freudian and social learning theories by acknowledging that how the child thinks about moral situations and social conflict is every bit as important as how she feels or behaves. However, the approach also has shortcomings. A major concern is whether moral reasoning is related to moral behavior. Scores on reasoning tests do not always correlate with tendencies to avoid cheating, to help others, or to abide by rules (Richards et al., 1992). The closest relationships are found between moral reasoning and specific negative social behaviors, such as aggression and delinquency in adolescents (Blasi, 1980; Gregg, Gibbs, & Basinger, 1994).

KEY THEME

Interaction Among Domains

social conventions Behavioral rules that regulate social interactions, such as dress codes and degrees of formality in speech.

TABLE 12.2 The Major Theories of Moral Development

Theory	Emphasis	Path of Development	Process of Moral Development
Freudian	Affective dimensions	Stagelike	Resolution of Oedipal/Electra conflict followed by identification with same-sex parent
Social Learning	Moral behavior	Continuous	Reinforcement and modeling of standards of behavior followed by internalization of those standards
Cognitive-Developmental			
Piaget Kohlberg	Moral reasoning Moral reasoning	Stagelike Stagelike	Growth in cognitive and perspective-taking skills that lead to more abstract, other-oriented principles of morality
Turiel	Moral reasoning	Continuous	Growth in knowledge of moral rules as distinct from social conventions

Another limitation is that current formulations do not capture the full range of moral principles individuals use in making ethical judgments across different cultures and between the sexes (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1989; Turiel, 1998; Turiel & Wainryb, 1994).

Although they highlight different facets of moral progress, Freudian, social learning, and cognitive-developmental theories (summarized in Table 12.2) all portray the child as moving from a self-orientation to an other-orientation. They also share the view of a child motivated initially by external events, such as rewards and punishments, or the need to affiliate with his parents. With development, the standards of morality become internalized. Ultimately, however, a complete theory of moral development should describe the ways the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions interact with one another. The importance of understanding these interactions is illustrated by the recent findings of a study conducted by Judith Smetana and her colleagues (Smetana et al., 1999). Maltreated and nonmaltreated preschoolers were equivalent in their judgments of the severity of various moral transgressions, such as hitting another child or not sharing a toy. However, maltreated children, compared with nonmaltreated children, reported different levels of affective reactions in such stories (e.g., that a perpetrator would feel less sadness when engaged in some transgression). Thus the findings suggest that the context in which children are socialized (e.g., maltreated versus nonmaltreated) can have different consequences for cognitive and affective measures used to provide insight into the topic of moral development. Perhaps research on more positive aspects of moral development can shed additional light on these complex interrelationships. It is to these more positive aspects that we turn next.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What kinds of responses are primarily emphasized in Freudian, social learning, and cognitive-developmental theories of moral development?
- How are the superego, the conscience, and the ego ideal formed in boys and girls according to Freud's theory?
- What findings provide support for the role of social learning in the acquisition of moral behavior?

- What are the basic elements of Piaget's theory of moral development? What elements of his theory are supported or refuted by research evidence?
- What are the primary stages of moral development according to Kohlberg? What kinds of data support his theory and what are some of the major criticisms of his perspective?
- What is the distinction between a morality of justice and a morality of care and responsibility? What evidence exists to suggest that the development of knowledge in the moral domain should be distinguished from the development of knowledge about social conventions?

Prosocial Behavior

A young child consoles a friend in distress, helps her pick up the pieces of a broken toy, or shares a snack. These **prosocial behaviors**, social actions performed to benefit others and perhaps the self, have come under increasing investigation in recent years as another way to understand the development of values and moral behavior in children. Among prosocial behaviors is **altruism**, behavior carried out to help others without expectation of rewards for oneself.

In contrast to research that focuses on justice and rights, prosocial and altruistic responses have a less obligatory, legalistic quality about them (Kahn, 1992). Acts of kindness or assistance are often discretionary but highly valued in many communities. Grade school children who tend to help others have better social skills (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989), are more popular with peers (Gottman, Gonso, & Rasmussen, 1975; McGuire & Weisz, 1982), and are more self-confident, self-assured, and better adjusted than those who do not. Thus prosocial behaviors are associated with many desirable outcomes, particularly in children's social relationships. Therefore, it is important to understand what influences the emergence of these qualities.

The Development of Prosocial Behaviors and Altruism

Several contemporary theorists believe an essential element underlying prosocial or altruistic behavior is **empathy**, a vicarious, shared emotional response involving an understanding and appreciation of the feelings of others that includes sympathetic concern for the person in need of assistance (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Perhaps humans are biologically predisposed to exhibit such a trait. Even infants show signs of sensitivity to the distress of others. Two- and three-day-olds may cry when other infants cry, but not in response to other, equally loud noises (Simner, 1971). In addition to crying, ten- to fourteen-month-olds may whimper or silently attend to expressions of distress from another person. Often they respond by soothing themselves, sucking their thumbs, or seeking a parent for comfort (Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1984). Perhaps because the boundary between self and another individual is not yet clear at this age, consoling the self is a form of coping with another's distress, a self-focused emotional reaction more than a genuine prosocial behavior.

Between one and two years of age, empathy may promote new behaviors typically called *sympathy*: touching or patting the distressed person as though to provide solace, seeking assistance for the person, or even giving the person something to provide comfort, such as a cookie, blanket, or teddy bear. The person's emotional state may also be labeled with expressions such as "Cry," "Oh-oh!," or "Hurting" (Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1984; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). Preschool children display more varied and complex responses, including comforting and helping the troubled child, asking questions of her, punishing the agent of the child's distress, protecting the child, and asking an adult for help.

Although many researchers report that helping and sharing increase with age, others note that older children may actually help or share less (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). Between ages six and sixteen, increasing concerns about

KEY THEME

Nature/Nurture



SEE FOR YOURSELF
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Promoting the Development of Empathy

prosocial behavior Positive social action performed to benefit others.

altruism Behavior carried out to help another without expectation of reward.

empathy An understanding and sharing of the feelings of others.

Even preschoolers display care and concern about others. Here a boy brushes sand from the face of his younger sister in an effort to keep her from becoming upset. These kinds of actions suggest that prosocial behavior is an early aspect of human development. Moreover, its expression very likely is greatly influenced by the socialization practices of parents and other caregivers.



self-interests and the expectations of others and greater consideration of the consequences of their actions can enter into decisions about assisting a person in need or performing another prosocial activity (Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 1995). Nevertheless, a recent meta-analysis of research on children and adolescents revealed that prosocial behavior increases with age and generally continues to show positive, although smaller, increases throughout the teenage years (Fabes et al., 1999).

Are girls, often believed to be more nurturing, caring, and empathic than boys, also more altruistic? On the whole, children display few sex differences in the amount of helping and sharing they exhibit (Radke-Yarrow et al., 1983). For example, when in the presence of a crying baby, girls are no more likely to assist than boys (Zahn-Waxler, Friedman, & Cummings, 1983). But some sex differences are observed favoring girls and the differences tend to increase with age (Fabes et al., 1999). These differences are more evident when measures of prosocial behavior involve being kind or considerate rather than when the activity demands helping, comforting, or sharing. In addition, they are more likely to be found when self-reports rather than observational methods are used to measure prosocial activity (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998).

● **The Relationship Between Empathy and Helping** Behaving prosocially, such as attempting to alleviate distress in others, may be a way to relieve a child's own empathic distress (Hoffman, 1976, 1982). Thus, if a boy sees that a friend who has just fallen down on the playground is crying, he feels uncomfortable. He knows how painful a skinned knee feels and shares his friend's anguish. To feel better himself, the boy rushes to help his playmate to the school nurse's office.

How strong is the connection between empathy and prosocial behavior? When children are asked to report their feelings, a consistent link between empathy and assisting others has not always been shown. However, empathy assessed by using nonverbal measures, such as facial expressions (e.g., sadness) or behavioral gestures that connote empathy or lack of it (e.g., looking away from the distressed person), is related to helping and sharing. Moreover, as children grow older, the relationship grows distinctly stronger (Eisenberg, 1986; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Roberts & Strayer, 1996).

A younger child may show signs of empathic distress but not know what form, if any, the assistance should take (Hoffman, 1976). If a playmate is crying as the result of a fall, should she be helped to stand up or left alone? Should the child say some-

thing comforting or reassuring or simply keep silent? As children mature, they are better able to interpret the emotions they are feeling, may experience them more strongly, and learn about the range of prosocial behaviors they can express. The distinction between self and other also matures and with it the realization that the other person's distress can be relieved by taking some action. However, individual differences in helpfulness do exist (Hay et al., 1999). Children who show greater prosocial behaviors as preschoolers continue to do so as adolescents (Eisenberg, Guthrie, et al., 1999). In addition, they are better able to take the perspective of another and therefore to feel sympathy for that individual. Unfortunately, if the emotional arousal is either too limited or becomes too great, children may either ignore another or focus on their own uncomfortable feelings at the expense of helping (Fabes et al., 1994; Miller et al., 1996; Young, Fox, & Zahn-Waxler, 1999).

KEY THEME

Individual Differences

ATYPICAL DEVELOPMENT**Conduct Disorders**

Anywhere from nearly one half to two thirds of children and adolescents who are referred to mental health centers in the United States display some type of conduct disorder. Conduct disorders range from highly aggressive and violent behaviors directed toward people or animals to the destruction of property, deceitfulness, theft, and truancy. Many of these problem behaviors, particularly violent crimes, have shown a substantial increase during the past decade (Children's Defense Fund, 1996; Hennes, 1998). All of them share the common denominator of violating or seriously disregarding the social norms and rules of the family, school, or society.

The factors hypothesized to contribute to the development of conduct disorders in children and adolescents are as varied as the types of problem behaviors that are identified as antisocial. For example, genetic and temperamental predispositions, along with inconsistent and coercive parenting practices—especially when discipline is based on physical punishment (see the chapter titled “The Family”) or includes abuse and maltreatment, frequent parental discord and conflict, or limited cognitive skills associated with perspective taking—may play some part in contributing to conduct disorders (Gabel, 1997; Horne, Glaser, & Calhoun, 1999). But is it possible that a child or adolescent who is aggressive and actually injures another person, who displays cruelty to pets, who intentionally and maliciously destroys another's property, or who often lies or engages in other threatening and harmful activities that violate the basic rights of others might be deficient in empathy? That is, are some children unable to emotionally share others' feelings and to understand the negative impact of their actions on others?

To examine this question, Douglas Cohen and Janet Strayer (1996) asked young people (ages fourteen to seventeen) who had been diagnosed as conduct disordered and were residing in a residential treatment center and a comparison group of normal young people from the same community to observe and respond to a videotaped set of vignettes depicting individuals in emotionally laden situations. They also completed a set of questionnaires about how certain types of situations made them feel (e.g., “Seeing [a child] who is crying makes me feel like crying” or “I am often very touched by the things that I see happen”). These various measures revealed that young people who display conduct disorders exhibit substantially less empathy than the comparison group; they are less good at identifying the emotions of others and showing responses concordant with and responsive to the emotional states of others.

Cohen and Strayer's research did not reveal why the differences in empathy between conduct-disordered and normal adolescents might exist. Perhaps family socialization practices that differ in the extent to which the youths' emotional needs are met or experienced are part of the answer. For example, concern for others is found more frequently in families in which warmth is high (see the chapter titled “The Family”), in which parents point out the consequences of harmful behavior, and in

KEY THEME

Nature/Nurture

which altruistic activities are modeled (Robinson, Zahn-Waxler, & Emde, 1994). Perhaps, too, children who begin to engage in antisocial conduct become less sensitive to and less willing to interpret empathic cues in others, growing increasingly callous to such information. Children who show signs of behavioral problems as preschoolers display similar levels of concern for others as children who display normative behavior. But by six to seven years of age, they no longer exhibit as much concern for others (Hastings et al., 2000). These results raise the question of how important empathic training might be for effective treatment of children who display conduct disorders. Many therapeutic efforts, especially when begun later in development, have not always benefitted children with conduct disorders (Gabel, 1997; Horne et al., 1999); perhaps increased efforts to foster empathy constitute one approach that needs further consideration.

TABLE 12.3
Levels of Prosocial Reasoning

Nancy Eisenberg has outlined the accompanying progression in prosocial reasoning. Children move from a concern with the self to a concern for others and show more internal, abstract bases for helping as they grow older.

● **Prosocial Reasoning** Just as moral reasoning associated with justice changes with development, so does reasoning associated with prosocial behavior. Nancy Eisenberg (1986) formulated prosocial dilemmas in which the interests of one person are in conflict with those of another individual or group. For example, a child on the way to a birthday party sees another child who has hurt her leg. Should she go find that child's parent in order to get her to a doctor? Or should she continue on to the birthday party so as not to miss the fun? In justifying their answers to such a dilemma, many preschool and some young school-age children in the United States use a *hedonistic orientation* in their reasoning, saying they would help to gain affection or material rewards such as candy or cake. A *needs-of-others orientation* prevails in the reasoning of early elementary school children, who typically express a concern for the physical or psychological needs of others ("He needs help"; "She's hurt"). An *approval and interpersonal orientation* is more prevalent in the middle childhood years as the child's responses increasingly take into consideration the reactions of others ("The child should help because the other person would like her"). During the later elementary years and into high school, a more *self-reflective, empathic orientation* emerges ("I'm trying to put myself in that person's shoes"). Older adolescents develop an *internalized orientation*, focusing on the importance of such emotions as happiness and pride to match internalized abstract principles of behavior concerned with fulfilling societal obligations, avoiding guilt, and maintaining self-respect.

Level	Age	Characteristics
Hedonistic orientation	Preschoolers and young elementary school children	Preoccupation with gain for the self as a result of being or not being altruistic
Needs-of-others orientation	Early and middle elementary school children	Concern for the physical and psychological needs of others although they may conflict with own
Approval and interpersonal orientation	Middle elementary and high school students	Reliance on stereotypes of good and bad and seeking approval from others for helping or not helping
Self-reflective, empathetic orientation	Late elementary and high school students	Concern for feelings of others and use of norms for prosocial behavior
Internalized orientation	High school students	Maintenance of self-respect for living up to internalized values and beliefs; belief in rights of all individuals and importance of fulfilling societal obligations

Source: Adapted from Eisenberg, 1986.

Table 12.3 outlines the stages of prosocial reasoning. As with other views of moral development, reasoning progresses from concern for external consequences to a more internalized, principled foundation. However, hedonistic responses do show some increase during the adolescent years, especially in boys (Eisenberg et al., 1995). As expected, level of orientation relates to behavior and how children are perceived by others. For example, children who reason hedonistically tend to donate toys, stickers, or other valued objects to other children less frequently and are evaluated less positively by peers than children of a similar age who reason at higher levels (Carlo et al., 1996; Eisenberg & Shell, 1986). The Moral and Prosocial Development chronology provides an additional summary of developmental changes for both moral and prosocial development.

● **Cross-Cultural Investigations** When asked to reason about prosocial dilemmas, children in other Western industrialized societies display similar patterns of development. German, Italian, and Polish children, for example, show the same progression from hedonistic to needs-of-others orientation that children in the United States do (Boehnke et al., 1989; Eisenberg et al., 1985). In other cultures, however, variations have been found. For example, elementary school children reared on the Israeli kibbutz reflect a more mature level of prosocial reasoning, voicing concern about the humaneness of the central character and the importance of internalized norms (“She has a duty to help others”) (Eisenberg, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Fuchs, 1990). A somewhat different picture emerges for children from the Maisin tribe, a coastal village society of Papua New Guinea. Here children maintain a needs-of-others orientation well into adolescence and even adulthood (Tietjen, 1986). These developmental patterns mirror the values emphasized by each culture. On the Israeli kibbutz, the goal of contributing to the good of the entire community is stressed, whereas among the Maisin, children are taught explicitly to be aware of and respond to the needs of specific others rather than to those of the larger social group.

Might children also show cross-cultural differences in their tendency to behave prosocially related to their prosocial reasoning? Nancy Graves and Theodore Graves (1983) studied the inhabitants of Aitutaki Island, one of the Cook Islands in the South Pacific. A tremendous economic shift, from a subsistence to an industrialized market economy, took place on parts of this island and produced corresponding changes in family structure and the roles of family members. Children living in the

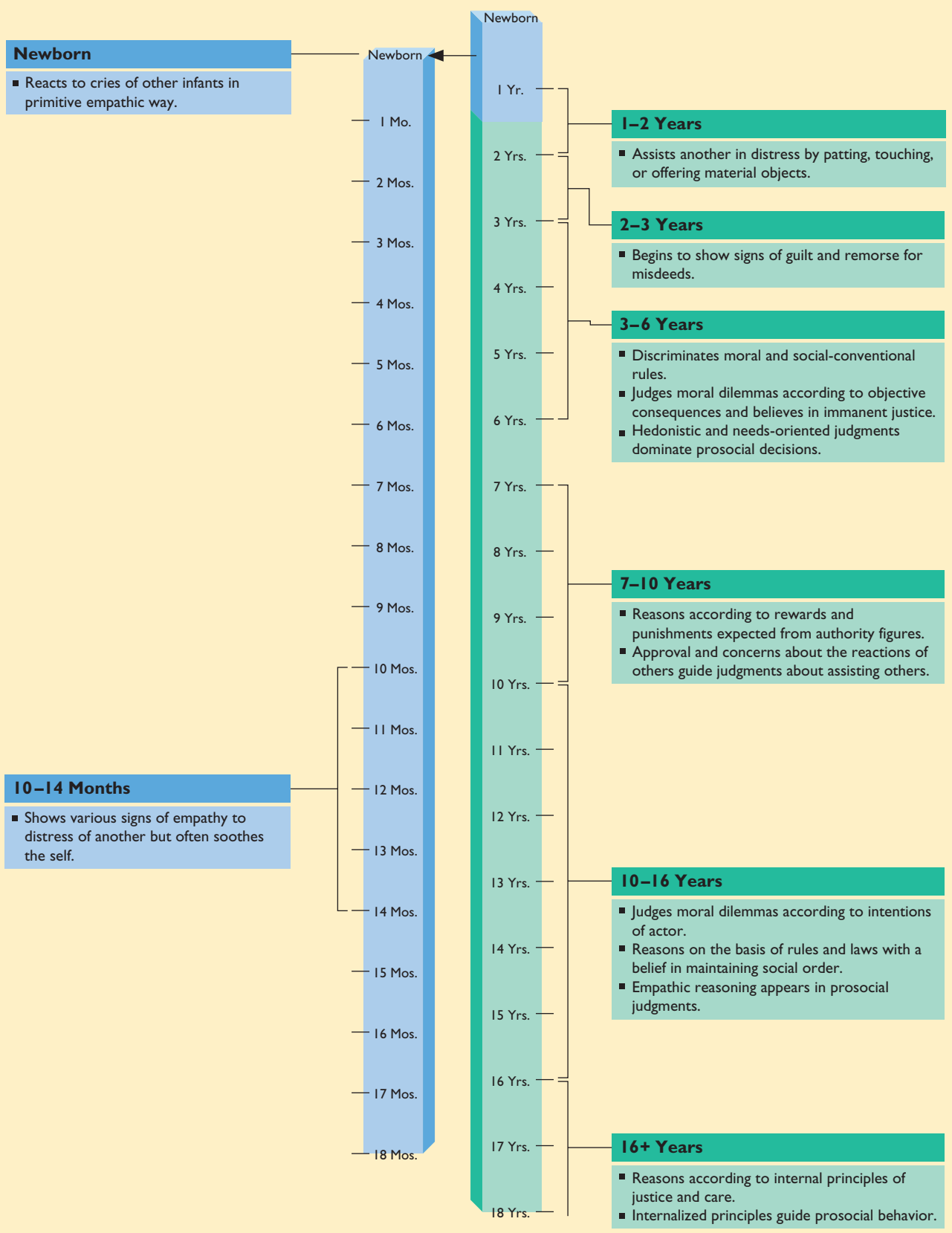
KEY THEME

Sociocultural Influence



Some children grow up in cultures in which they contribute to the needs of the entire community. Here children in India assist by carrying firewood to their local rural village. Children reared in group-oriented societies tend to engage in more prosocial behavior than children reared in settings that emphasize individualism.

CHRONOLOGY: Moral and Prosocial Development



This chart describes the sequence in the development of moral and prosocial behavior based on the findings of research. Children often show individual differences in the exact ages at which they display the various developmental achievements outlined here.

unaffected rural villages grow up in extended families in which they make substantial contributions to family and community goals. They participate in most community affairs, are sent by elders to share food and goods with other village members, and bring the family contribution to church each week. In contrast, children growing up in urban, more modernized settings are reared in nuclear families and participate less in both family and community functions.

Graves and Graves (1983) observed that children five and six years of age in the urban communities were less likely to assist others in their homes and surrounding environs than were children in rural settings. The researchers conclude that prosocial behavior is more likely in societies in which the predominant ethic is one of interdependence and group orientation and in which the child participates in cooperative work experiences than it is in cultures that emphasize individualism and self-reliance. In general, children from traditional rural communities tend to be more cooperative than children from urban cultures (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Also, children from more communal cultures (typical of Asian countries) tend to share more than children from cultures emphasizing individualism (typical of Western countries) (Rao & Stewart, 1999).

● **The Role of Socialization** What role do child-rearing techniques play in the emergence of prosocial behavior? As social learning theory would predict, reinforcement can be influential. Both material rewards (e.g., money, candy, tokens) and social rewards (“You’re a good boy!”) increase the likelihood that children will share with or help others, although social rewards and acknowledgments seem to motivate greater care and concern for others (Grusec, 1991). Opportunities for observational learning are another potent factor. When a child sees someone make a donation to a needy person or group, he is likely to be charitable as well (Grusec & Skubiski, 1970).

What models do appears to be more important than what they say (Rushton, 1975); yet the nature of caregivers’ verbal communications also has a bearing on prosocial behavior. When parents use **induction**—that is, explain why transgressions are wrong, provide a rationale for rules and regulations, present a reason for prosocial activity, and express disappointment at specific behaviors when exhibited inappropriately—their children are more likely to practice prosocial behaviors (Hastings et al., 2000; Hoffman, 1975; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996). For example, a parent might say, “Don’t pull Sam’s hair! That hurts him. You don’t like to have your hair pulled, do you?” Such messages emphasize clear communication about standards for behavior, arouse empathic feelings, and stimulate perspective taking (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). In contrast, a far less effective means of fostering prosocial behavior involves **power assertion**, using forceful commands, physical punishment, or removal of material objects or privileges to influence behavior. For example, the parent might yell, “Stop that! You’re not watching TV tonight!” as her son pulls his brother’s hair.

Assigning responsibility to children, particularly for tasks that benefit others rather than oneself, also has an impact. For example, having adolescents contribute to household chores such as gardening, helping to prepare meals, keeping the family room clean, or other activities beneficial to the family as a whole is related to the production of more prosocial activities that benefit the family than is taking responsibility for tasks that only directly profit oneself, such as taking care of one’s own room or cleaning up one’s own space (Grusec, Goodnow, & Cohen, 1996). Moreover, prosocial actions are increased when children are “expected” to initiate and routinely complete these helping activities—that is, when children must self-regulate their actions in these realms rather than when they are requested to carry out the chores on particular occasions.

Another socialization technique that may be as effective as induction is to emphasize the child’s prosocial characteristics. When a child is told, “I guess you’re the kind of person who helps others whenever you can,” her tendency to behave prosocially greatly increases (Mills & Grusec, 1989). Perhaps attributing to the child a sense of concern for others changes her self-concept and she strives to behave in a manner consistent with that image (Grusec, 1982). Parents do not make prosocial attributions

KEY THEME**Nature/Nurture**

induction Parental control technique that relies on the extensive use of reasoning and explanation, as well as the arousal of empathic feelings.

power assertion Parental control technique that relies on the use of forceful commands, physical punishment, and removal of material objects or privileges.



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about their children often, but it is precisely the rarity of these comments that may make them so powerful in the eyes of the child (Grusec, 1991).

● **Prosocial Behavior and Academic Achievement** Recent research has revealed a surprisingly intriguing link between prosocial behavior and academic achievement. In one study carried out by Gian Caprara and colleagues (Caprara et al., 2000), eight- to nine-year-olds in a community near Rome, Italy, were revisited five years later as adolescents. In contrast to the more traditional focus, in which negative factors such as aggression in young children are studied as a condition predicting poor academic achievement, this study examined the consequences of prosocial behavior on success in the later school years. Teachers, peers, and the children themselves rated their willingness to help, share, be cooperative, and be kind. Even after controlling for level of early academic achievement as third-graders, the researchers found that higher levels of prosocial behavior displayed at this younger age subsequently predicted greater achievement in school as adolescents (Caprara et al., 2000). In another study carried out in Shanghai, China, a greater prosocial orientation among sixth-graders also was correlated with greater academic achievement two years later (Chen et al., 2000). These results suggest that educational environments might benefit from emphasizing prosocial behaviors as much as, if not more than, from the fairly widespread practice of focusing on reducing negative behaviors.

Additional Factors in Prosocial Behavior

KEY THEME

Sociocultural Influence

Surprisingly, developmental researchers have seldom investigated the many potential influences that exposure to religious education and other social organizations such as scouting, boys' and girls' clubs, and other community programs may have on the development of prosocial responses and values. Yet many parents would claim that such activities also play a vital role in the development of socially acceptable behaviors. In one study of children given training in their Jewish or Christian faith, participants as young as ten years were found to distinguish between moral issues they considered to be unalterable (stealing, hitting, damaging another's property) and conventional religious practices that might change in certain circumstances or not apply to other individuals (dress customs, dietary laws, worship activities). Thus they can distinguish moral issues involving justice and human welfare associated with their religion from social conventions that arise from exposure to their particular faith (Nucci & Turiel, 1993). In other words, recognizing what is moral and what is socially determined very likely is influenced not only by parental teachings and school practices but also by the myriad other activities and examples to which children are exposed in their particular social contexts. Issues of fairness and rights, caring and cooperation, and duties and personal responsibility are among those that individuals in most cultures believe are too important to be left to just one component of the child's experiences.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What are the differences between prosocial behavior, altruism, and empathy?
- How does empathy develop and what is its relationship to prosocial behavior?
- To what extent are conduct disorders associated with lack of empathy?
- How do cross-cultural differences in child rearing influence displays of prosocial behavior?
- What roles do socialization practices such as the use of induction and power assertion techniques play in displays of prosocial behavior?
- What relationship exists between prosocial behavior and academic achievement?
- What other factors influence prosocial behavior?

CHAPTER RECAP

SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENTAL THEMES

■ **Nature/Nurture** *What roles do nature and nurture play in the development of the self and of values?*

Although early, biologically based tendencies for children to display a mastery orientation and empathy may exist, most researchers have described how the child's cognitions and social experiences shape self and values. For example, feedback from others certainly plays an enormous role in the child's characterization of self and prosocial behavior. Theorists such as Piaget and Kohlberg suggest that maturation contributes in part to changes in moral reasoning. But even they believe children's experiences with peers and other socializing agents play a large role in spurring moral reasoning.

■ **Sociocultural Influence** *How does the sociocultural context influence the development of the self and of values?*

Children's evaluations of self are greatly determined by the extent to which they display autonomy, loyalty, cooperation, perseverance, and other qualities stressed by the culture. Self-esteem is affected by how well children live up to the society's expectations concerning beauty, athletic skill, academic ability, and other attributes the culture values. Moral reasoning and behavior further reflect the values of a culture. When responsibilities to the larger social group are emphasized, children tend to be more caring and display more prosocial reasoning than when the culture emphasizes the role of the individual. In addition, groups place different weights on law and justice versus other values, such as harmonious interactions with others. Children's responses to moral dilemmas often reflect their culture's unique beliefs.

■ **Child's Active Role** *How does the child play an active role in the development of the self and of values?*

Caregivers take on initial responsibility for instituting standards for the behavior of young children. As children gain cognitive and social skills, they initiate efforts to control their own activities and are assumed to internalize the values of the larger society. Children also begin to recognize that they are competent individuals, capable of influencing and controlling their environment in realistic ways. Their judgments about the appropriateness of moral and prosocial actions are assumed to influence their behavior as well.

■ **Continuity/Discontinuity** *Is the development of the self and of values continuous or discontinuous?*

Although the child's understanding of self undergoes many developmental changes, evidence that these changes are stagelike remains limited. Even the identity crisis, often considered a hallmark of adolescence, may not be experienced by all young people and reflects a culmination of many earlier, gradual changes. Several influential theories of moral development are stage theories, specifically those of Piaget and Kohlberg. The empirical evidence, however, suggests that reasoning about moral, prosocial, and other values may occur at several levels within the same individual. Although stage theories are popular, domain-specific approaches emphasizing continuous growth are prominent as well.

■ **Individual Differences** *How prominent are individual differences in the development of the self and of values?*

Because the reactions of others play an important role in the development of self, children may differ enormously in how they view themselves and in how they interact with their world. Some may develop confidence and a sense of control; others may express considerable uncertainty and a sense of helplessness. As a result of their socialization experiences and opportunities to interact with peers, children also display considerable differences in their moral and prosocial values.

■ **Interaction Among Domains** *How does the development of the self and of values interact with development in other domains?*

Cognitive skills, such as the ability to reason abstractly about the feelings and intentions of others, play a role in evaluations of self and moral judgments. Emotions such as empathy contribute to prosocial behaviors and altruism. Physical changes and capacities, as well as the social environment, can dramatically affect self-esteem and the emergence of identity. At the same time, development of the self and of values has an effect on other domains. For example, high self-esteem and prosocial activity are associated with healthy peer interactions. Development of the self and of values represents an important interaction among affect, cognition, and social experience.

SUMMARY OF TOPICS

The Concept of Self

- Researchers concerned with the development of *self*—the beliefs, knowledge, and feelings an individual uses to describe his personal characteristics—make the distinction between self as *object* and self as *subject*.

Self as Object

- Self as object consists of *self-concept*, the perceptions, ideas, and beliefs a person holds to be true of himself or herself.
- Evidence exists that children begin to distinguish their own behaviors from those of others in the first year of life.

However, a sense of themselves as objects is first evident in their self-recognition at about fifteen to eighteen months of age.

- During the preschool years children typically define themselves in terms of a *categorical self*, that is, by referring to various categories that provide membership in one group or another. By the early school years, *social comparison* involving others becomes important. Effects on others and their relationships to broader sociocultural ideals become a central part of the adolescent's definitions of self.

Self as Subject

- Self as subject includes the child's sense of agency, individuality, stability, and reflection.
- Infants seem to be born with an intrinsic desire to gain control of their world. To the extent that an environment provides consistent feedback, children acquire an increasing sense of agency.
- Children with a *mastery orientation* believe they have considerable influence over what happens to them. Those who experience *learned helplessness* believe they have little influence over what happens to them. Mastery orientation and learned helplessness are also determined in part by the extent to which children perceive their abilities as entity-based or as a result of their effort.
- Learned helplessness can be reduced by a focus on effort and by avoiding either praise or criticism of stable abilities.

Self-esteem: Evaluating Self

- *Self-esteem* consists of the positive or negative feelings a person has about himself. It stems from the evaluation of others, as well as the extent to which the child feels successful in those areas thought to be important.
- Self-esteem is very high in preschoolers but tends to decline in earlier elementary school, and for many, especially girls, it shows a further decline during the early adolescent years.

Identity

- *Identity* refers to the broad, coherent view that a person holds about oneself. Although Erik Erikson considered the acquisition of one's identity to be an important achievement during the adolescent years, others suggest it is an ongoing process that continues into adulthood.
- Although many adolescents may experience greater conflict with their parents as they explore new ways of behaving, most successfully negotiate the teenage years without undergoing an *identity crisis*, a period of great stress and uncertainty.
- Acquiring an *ethnic identity*, a sense of belonging to one's own ethnic and cultural minority group, seems to benefit children and their understanding of others.

Self-regulation and Self-control

- Initial efforts at *self-regulation* of behavior are instituted by adults and take the form of co-regulation involving caregiver and child. *Self-control* involves the child's regulation of behavior apart from the caregiver.

Developmental Changes

- Self-regulation efforts usually begin in the second half of the first year of life and continue throughout childhood. Self-initiated attempts to control behavior become more evident as children demonstrate increasing capacities for *delay of gratification* and other forms of compliance, planning, and orderly behavior.

The Influence of Language and Attention

- Verbal, attentional, and other cognitive mechanisms appear to be important in children's efforts to control their own behavior.

Individual Differences

- Differences in the ability of children to regulate their own behavior remain consistent throughout childhood.

Moral Development

- Moral development refers to the child's acquisition of the standards of conduct considered ethical within a culture.

Freud's Theory

- Freud's theory focuses on the affective relationship between child and parents. Through the process of identification and as a result of his or her emotional relationship with a parent, the child acquires a *superego*, a *conscience*, and an *ego ideal*. Guilt and other responses indicating internalization of parental and cultural standards begin to be evident in the second year and are displayed in a wide number of ways.

Social Learning Theory

- Social learning theory focuses on the display of moral behavior, such as children's ability to resist temptation. From this perspective, the reinforcements children receive from parents and other agents of socialization, as well as their observations of the behavior of others, are important for moral development.

Cognitive-Developmental Theories

- Cognitive-developmental theories emphasize the child's level of moral reasoning in conflict situations.
- Both Piaget and Kohlberg have outlined stages in the development of moral thought. In Piaget's theory, children progress from *moral realism* to *moral relativism* as their cognitive capabilities mature. In Kohlberg's view, most children advance through *preconventional*, *conventional*, and *postconventional* levels of moral reasoning. Both Piaget and Kohlberg maintain that the child's increasing perspective-taking skills are a major factor in these changes.
- Kohlberg's theory focuses on the development of a *morality of justice*. However, others suggest that consideration needs to be given to the development of a *morality of care and responsibility*, a form of morality that may be more evident among girls than boys.
- Newer domain-specific approaches to moral development distinguish between moral knowledge and social-conventional knowledge.

- The relationships among emotional, behavioral, and cognitive measures of moral development is not always strong. However, all theories portray the child as moving from a self-orientation to an other-orientation in consideration of what is moral and socially acceptable.

Prosocial Behavior

- *Prosocial behavior* may be performed for a number of reasons. However, *altruism* is a specific form of prosocial behavior in which the individual expects no rewards for himself or herself.

The Development of Prosocial Behaviors and Altruism

- Evidence for *empathy*, an understanding and sharing of the feelings of others, is displayed in early infancy. By the preschool years children engage in substantive effort to help others. Reasoning about prosocial behavior undergoes a developmental change from a focus on the concern with external consequences of acting in certain ways to a more internalized, principled basis for helping behavior.

- Children who are rewarded for prosocial behaviors and who observe parents and others acting prosocially tend to be more helpful than other children. Children whose parents use induction as a disciplinary technique and who grow up in cultures that emphasize group values are also more likely to demonstrate care and concern for others than children whose parents use *power assertion* as a disciplinary technique or who grow up in cultures emphasizing greater individualism.
- Children who display *conduct disorders* show lower levels of empathy than do normal children, especially once they enter the elementary school years.
- Prosocial behavior seems to be correlated with higher academic achievement.

Additional Factors in Prosocial Behavior

- Although little research exists, religious and other organized socialization programs also probably encourage children to engage in more prosocial behavior as they grow older.