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CHILDREN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE VALUES
OF THEIR PEERS AND PARENTS:
PRESCRIPTIVE OR PROSCRIPTIVE?

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# CHILDREN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE VALUES OF THEIR PEERS AND PARENTS: PRESCRIPTIVE OR PROSCRIPTIVE?

By

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ABSTRACT

CHILDREN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE VALUES
OF THEIR PEERS AND PARENTS:
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Sixty-two students in grades five, eight, and eleven were asked to finish incomplete sentences which were designed to examine their impressions of why they are rewarded and punished by their parents and peers. Their responses were scored according to whether they emphasized "right doing" (i.e., prescriptive values) or "wrong doing" (i.e., proscriptive values). The responses to the peer stems were compared with the responses to the parent stems in order to test the hypothesis that children and adolescents would perceive their peers as having a stronger prescriptive values orientation than the values orientation of their parents. Although the subjects used more prescriptive responses to complete the peer stems than the parent stems, the differences between the responses to these two groups of stems were not significant. It was suggested that this lack of significance may have been due, in part, to the poor reliability of the measurements used by the experimenter.

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# INTRODUCTION

In the past ten years researchers have been attracted to two topics: 1) children's impressions of the factors which influence social interaction, and 2) the ways that children acquire prosocial behaviors. Previously a large amount of attention had been paid to the ways children learned not to perform behaviors which are socially prohibited (e.g., not to lie, not to cheat, etc.) and to children's impressions of why an act was good or bad (e.g., Pieget's work on moral judgment). The interest in children's impressions of regulations has continued; only recently, however, have persons investigated how children develop tendencies to perform behaviors which are socially admirable or acceptable. Very little of this research has been concerned with the ways that peer interaction influences these processes. In this paper I would seek to discuss the ways the ways that parents and peers affect the ways children learn what is permitted and prohibited by society. Essentially I will be discussing the development of values.

The topic of values has been discussed by many persons and a clear definition has not emerged. The term "values" has been used to describe impressions, opinions, priorities, goals, etc. in fields as diverse as psychology, economics, aesthetics and philosophy. Rokeach (1973) has

examined the notion of values and has suggested that behavioral values can be divided into two groups: instrumental or means values and terminal or ends values. Instrumental or means values refer to behavior or modes of conduct. Rokeach explains that having an instrumental value for a particular type of behavior means that one finds this behavior to be socially or personally preferable to alternative forms of behavior. An example of an instrumental value is honesty. Terminal or ends values are concerned with "end states of existence." That is, a person with a given terminal value considers that particular end state to be desirable and "worth striving for" (p. 160). An example of what a terminal value might be is peace or justice.

When I speak of values in this paper I am referring to the internal individual standards used by persons to guide and judge their own behavior and the behavior of other persons. By "internal" I mean that a person follows these values even in the absence of external enforcement. By "individual" I mean that the values held by one person may be quite different from the values held by another person. It is important to remember that there are different types of values: economic, aesthetic, behavioral, etc. The major emphasis of this paper will be on behavioral values.

Interest in values can be seen among at least three groups of psychologists: (1) the psychoanalysts; (2) the cognitive structuralists; and (3) the learning theorists.

Freud considered values to be a part of the child's superego. The contents of the superego were acquired during the child's identification with his/her parents. At this time the child internalizes the standards of the parents. These standards include notions about which behaviors and thoughts are acceptable (i.e., the ego ideal) and which thoughts and behaviors are unacceptable (i.e., the conscience). The ego ideal serves as a standard of personal excellence and it rewards the child through pride when the child aspires toward this standard. The conscience guides the person away from those behaviors or thoughts which are unacceptable. When persons think or do something which is unacceptable to the conscience they are punished through guilt (Freud, 1959).

The Freudian notion of values implies that they are a part of the personality. Their acquisition is mostly a result of parent-child interaction and this process occurs during childhood and is complete before asolescence (Freud, 1959). More recent accounts of these processes have suggested that although a large part of the superego develops very early in life it can change over time. It has been suggested that these processes can be influenced by persons such as coaches, teachers, etc. Very little, if any, consideration is given to peers. (Brenner, 1972)

From an analytical point of view, if one would like to understand the development of values one must consider the structure of the personality. Another perspective

which persons have used to examine the development of values has not been the structure of personality but instead the structure of thought. Piaget, and more recently Eisenberg-Berg and Kohlberg, have examined the ways that children cognitively approach moral issues.

Piaget classified the development of morals and values into two distinct stages: first, a period of constraint and second, a period of cooperation. The period of constraint is characterized by the young child's belief that rules are rigid and unchanging laws conforming to some type of moral order enforced by an external agent. Piaget claims that young children think that "things are as they ought to be." He says that children during this early stage do not base their conception of good on moral or ethical principles; instead they decide upon an act's goodness depending on whether it conforms to rules enforced by parents and other powerful external agents. That is, the goodness of an act is a function of its adherence to rules, not to its appeal to abstract moral principles. (Piaget, 1948)

The second stage is one of cooperation wherein the person is no longer primarily concerned with the strict obedience to rules. Instead they consider the principles which underlie rules and try to account for the reasons why persons behave in certain ways. Piaget notes that these changes are influenced by the child's peer relations

and the child's shift in cognitive level. He asserts that their ability to consider the intentions and motives of others depends on their ability to decenter. That is, it depends on their awareness that their point of view may be different from the perspective of another person. Piaget claims that these abilities are enhanced by children's play in which they experience the roles of other persons (Piaget, 1948). This notion that play and particularly role playing are important for the development of moral judgment has been supported by the research of Robert Selman (1971).

Kohlberg has expanded Piaget's notion into a scheme of six stages of "value orientations" (1963, p. 13) which he divides into three levels of morality. He claims these stages occur in an invariant sequence. (Kohlberg, 1963)

He describes the first level as a premoral level. Children at this level base their decisions of whether an act is good or bad on the act's consequences for the actor. An act is good if the actor is rewarded (stage 2) and is bad if the actor is punished (stage 1).

Kohlberg claims this first level is replaced by one which is characterized by conformity to moral rules. He says that persons in this stage will make judgments according to whether an act conforms to a person's role (stage three) or to rules drawn up by authorities (stage four).

The third level is reached by persons who hold self-accepted moral principles. Persons on this level look to individual rights and standards agreed upon by the whole

society (stage five) or ethical principles such as equality of justice (stage six) when they form their moral judgments.

The child's approach to moral judgment as described by Kohlberg starts at a point where judgments are based on egocentric considerations and then changes to a stage based on roles and interpersonal duties. The end of the course is reached when persons refer to abstract concepts when resolving conflict between social norm, laws and personal desires.

Kohlberg claims that changes in moral judgment are a function of changes in cognitive ability and role-taking skills. Both of these notions have received strong support. (See Tomlinson-Keasey and Keasey, 1974 and Selman, 1971.) Unfortunately, moral judgment is only slightly associated with prosocial behavior and it does not address the question of why a person would, or would not, act in a prosocial manner.

Kohlberg and Piaget are primarily interested in children's conceptions of rules and their moral decision making skills. Recently, however, Eisenberg-Berg has questioned children about the reasons motivating someone to act prosocially (Eisenberg-Berg, 1977). Essentially she has found an age-related trend similar to the one outlined by Kohlberg. That is, young children referred to instrumental needs and satisfaction when explaining why someone should or should not help another person. Older children referred to social norms or approval (e.g.,

"It's nice to help," "He'd like it if I helped"), empathic understanding (e.g., "I know how he must feel," "I care about him") or internalized standards (e.g., "I have a responsibility to help people in need").

The trend that she has found nicely parallels the changes observed by Kohlberg. Like Kohlberg, she feels that these changes are due to greater role taking skills and more sophisticated cognitive abilities among older children. Although neither Kohlberg nor Eisenberg-Berg directly assessed the influence of peer experience, they both suggest that it plays a part in these processes. There are at least two drawbacks to Eisenberg-Berg's and Kohlberg's schemes. First, they deal only with changes in reasoning and do not examine changes in the behavioral tendencies of children faced with moral dilemmas. Second, they have noted changes in the ways children think about the morality of a person's behavior in a hypothetical situation without explaining the amount of attention that children pay to the different features of the stories they use. In other words, they have noted differences in reasoning and they have concluded that these changes are due to the acquisition of more sophisticated cognitive interpretations of these stores when in fact it could be due to a change in the patterns of attention that children pay to the stories' features at different ages.

A third group of psychologists have proposed another model to explain the development of values. Unlike Freud or Piaget, Kohlberg and Eisenberg-Berg, the learning theorists

do not look to structural aspects of thought or personality. Instead they stress behavior and observation of other persons. Hill (1960) asserts that very little can be said about internal processes of values and he suggests that persons should be concerned with behaviors indicative of values. A large amount of research has demonstrated that children will imitate other persons' behaviors and that observation of models can influence a child's generosity and propensity toward helping (Midlarsky, Bryan and Brickman, 1973). The effects of observation can be seen even two months later (Rushton, 1975) and can be more influential than verbal encouragement (Yarrow, Scott and Waxler, 1972).

Perhaps learning theory can provide a useful framework to examine the ways children acquire an understanding of the distinction of those behaviors which are socially admirable and those which are socially prohibited. Hill (1960) points out that the notions of punishment and reward are implicit in Freud's discussion of the conscience and ego ideal.

McKinney (1971) has proposed another dimension to complement the reward-punishment dimension. The dimension described by McKinney involves "right doing" and "wrong doing." When these two dimensions are combined they form a four-fold model in which a person could be rewarded for either "doing" or "not doing" and punished for either "doing" or "not doing." McKinney outlines two systems: the prescriptive system and the proscriptive system. In

the prescriptive system a person is rewarded for doing and punished for not doing. For example, a person might be rewarded for doing well in school and punished for not doing well in school. In a proscriptive system a person may be rewarded for not failing in school and punished for failing in school. In other words, the proscriptive system stresses the "thou shalt nots" and the prescriptive system stresses the "thou shalts." McKinney (1971) conducted a study to determine the extent of the prescriptive and proscriptive orientations. He asked 67 college students to complete sentence stems and then scored them according to their prescriptive or proscriptive orientation. Almost all the responses to the sentence stems involving a reward situation were prescriptively oriented. That is, nearly all the people thought they were rewarded for doing. The stems involving punishment, however, were completed with both prescriptive and proscriptive responses. Apparently, sometimes persons thought that they were punished for doing and sometimes they were punished for not doing.

The notion of prescriptive and proscriptive values has not received much attention in the literature. However, one can find inferences to this dimension in the results of some studies conducted to examine related topics. For example, Crandall, Katkovsky and Crandall (1965) reported the results of a study designed to examine children's locus of control in academic situations. One of these results bore a resemblance to the prescriptive/proscriptive

dimension discussed by McKinney. They found that "there is a trend for a young child who wishes to appear socially acceptable to deny that he is at fault when he fails and for the older child who seeks social acceptance to claim credit for his successes" (p. 107).

In other words, the young children they referred to attributed their failure to external sources whereas the older children they referred to attributed their successes to internal causes. The younger subjects of their study were in grades three, four and five and the older subjects were in grades six through twelve. From the perspective of the prescriptive/proscriptive system it seems that the younger subjects they mentioned were concerned with "wrong doing" (i.e., denying failure) while the older subjects were concerned with "right doing" (i.e., claiming credit for successes).

The results of a study conducted by Ervin Staub are similar to the results of the Crandall, Katkovsky and Crandall study. Staub (1971) was interested in knowing how persons would respond to cries of distress. He told his subjects he was interested in collecting some information and he asked them to fill out a form containing a series of questions. Each subject was placed in a room adjoining another room where they were told another subject was completing the same form. Actually, no one was in the other room. Staub divided the subjects into three groups; each

group received a different set of instructions. One group was told they were permitted to go into the other room while they were completing the form or after they were finished. A second group was told they were not permitted to go into the other room in order to prevent interaction between the subjects. The third group was given no information about going into the other room. Within each group there were two age levels: the younger subjects were seventh-grade girls and the older subjects were women between the ages of 18 and 23 years. As the subjects were completing the forms Staub played a tape recording of a person crying for help from the adjoining room. Staub recorded how frequently persons in each group responded to the calls of distress. A response was considered as either going to the other room or notifying the experimenter that someone was in trouble.

There were no differences in response according to age in the permission or prohibition conditions. That is, in the permission condition both age groups responded with equal frequency. Again in the prohibition condition both age groups responded equally as often. Not surprisingly, the level of response for both age groups was lower in the prohibition condition than in the permission condition. There was, however, a difference in the no-information condition. In this condition the response rate of the older subjects was similar to the response rate of the older subjects in the permission condition. The younger

subjects in the no-information condition responded at a rate resembling the prohibition. The older subjects treated the no-information condition like the permission condition whereas the younger subjects treated this condition like the prohibition condition.

In his discussion of these results Staub suggested that the socialization of young children may overemphasize the teaching of prohibitions. He claims that when faced with the possibility of disapproval for not helping or disapproval for doing something not specifically permitted the young children prefer the former.

As mentioned earlier there are similarities between the results obtained by Staub and the findings of Crandall, Katkovsky and Crandall. It seems that in both studies the younger subjects were concerned with "not doing" (i.e., not accepting failure and not breaking a rule) and the older subjects were concerned with "doing" (i.e., accepting credit for successes and helping).

If McKinney's concept of prescriptive and proscriptive values were applied to these results it would appear that the younger subjects were operating in a proscriptive system. A possible explanation for this might be found by considering the social settings of the older and younger subjects. As children grow older their peers become a more-salient feature of their environment. Sullivan (1953) has noted that peer interaction becomes more important as persons become older. Many studies have noted the

importance of peer expectations, especially among young adolescents (Williams, Iscoe and Harvey, 1963; Hartup, 1970). This does not mean that parental influence is not important; it merely suggests that peer influence becomes increasingly important with age. Brittain (1963) demonstrated that both peer and parental influence are important and that this importance varies with the characteristics of the situations.

If there is a relationship between the shift from parent to peer influence and the shift from a proscriptive to a prescriptive orientation then there should be a difference in the ways that the values orientations of peers and parents are perceived. Peers should be perceived as being prescriptive and parents should be perceived as being proscriptive.

Data previously collected by McKinney (1971) were re-analyzed and the results partially supported this proposal. Sixty-seven college students were asked to complete these four sentence stems: "My parents are upset with me when I . . . "; "My friends are upset with me when I . . . "; "My parents are happy with me when I . . . ," and "My friends are happy with me when I . . . ."

All the reward stems but one were completed with prescriptive responses.

There were, however, differences among the responses to the punishment stems. Of the 134 responses to the punishment stems 45 were prescriptive and 84 were proscriptive

(five were unscoreable). The first stem (the parent punishment stem) received 13 prescriptive responses, 51 proscriptive responses and three unscoreable responses. The second punishment stem (the peer punishment stem) received 32 prescriptive responses, 33 proscriptive responses and two unscoreable responses. The raw data indicate that in regard to punishment peers were perceived as being equally prescriptive and proscriptive whereas parents were perceived as being more proscriptive than prescriptive. This difference between peers and parents was significant ($\chi^2 = 11.9285$, $p < 0.01$).

These results indicate that the subjects had different perceptions of their peers' and parents' values orientation in regard to punishment. Parents were regarded as punishing for proscriptive reasons more often than prescriptive reasons. Peers were regarded as punishing for prescriptive and proscriptive reasons with equal frequency. The nature of these data, however, may indicate a stronger difference than actually exists. Since the responses were scored as either prescriptive or proscriptive the scoring of a response as being one of these excluded the possibility of its being scored as the other. In summarizing these data it is possible to say that in terms of punishment orientation parents were considered relatively more proscriptive than prescriptive and relative to peers they are more proscriptive and less prescriptive.

One difficulty in comparing parents and peers on

the dimension of punishment may be that persons are punished more often by their parents than their peers. Parents may be regarded as being more proscriptive because they punish more often than peers do. It would be necessary to control for this factor when examining the punishment orientation of parents and peers.

In light of the previously mentioned theories and studies I would like to propose two hypotheses:

1. Parents will be perceived as being more proscriptive than peers in regard to punishment, even when the frequency of the punishment is held constant

2. The prescriptive system will be more apparent among older children

# METHOD

## Subjects

Sixty-five children (nine boys and ten girls from grade five, five boys and sixteen girls from grade eight and seven boys and eighteen girls from grade eleven) participated as subjects in this study; they were all students in the school system of Mason, Michigan.

The experimenter sent letters to each child's parents; they were asked to permit their child to take part in this study. (A copy of the letter of consent is included in Appendix A.) The experimenter met with the children who obtained this permission in their classrooms. Each child was encouraged to read the sentence stems carefully and to respond to each item honestly; they were assured there were no right or wrong answers. All the subjects, but one, completed all the items. Each of them participated anonymously and they and their parents have received a letter explaining the study's results and thanking them for their assistance.

The average age of the subjects was 13.7 years; within each grade the averages were 16.8 years in grade 11, 13.2 years in grade 8, and 10.3 years in grade 5.

Procedures

The subjects were asked to complete thirty sentence stems and rate, on a scale of one to five, how sure they were of their responses. Twelve of these stems were designed to obtain information about how the subjects perceived the values orientations of their peers and parents. The remaining eighteen stems were included to prevent response sets.

Half the stems referred to reward and the other half referred to punishment. The reward stems were:

"My friends are happy with me when I . . ."

"My parents are happy with me when I . . ."

"My parents are pleased with me when I . . ."[1]

"My parents are pleased with me when I . . ."

"My mother is pleased with me when I . . ."

"My father is pleased with me when I . . ."

The punishment stems were:

"My friends are upset with me when I . . ."

"My friends are disappointed with me when I . . ."

"My parents are upset with me when I . . ."

"My parents are disappointed with me when I . . ."

---

[1]This is an accurate list of the stems I used in this study. Originally I had intended the third stem to read "My friends are happy with me when I . . . ." Unfortunately I failed to notice an error in the questionnaire form until just before I met with subjects. Since I have made no hypotheses about the subjects' responses to reward stems I did not alter the makeup of these stems.

"My mother is upset with me when I . . ."

"My father is upset with me when I . . ."

These twelve stems were randomly distributed among the other eighteen stems (see Appendix B for a copy of the form used).

Beside each stem a scale numbering from one to five was provided for the subjects to rate how sure they were of their responses to that stem. A rating of "one" indicated they were very sure of their responses whereas a rating of "five" indicated the subject was unsure of the response.

It took most of the subjects about 30 minutes to complete the sentence stems and rate their responses. After they were finished the purposes and the hypotheses of the study were explained to them. The experimenter answered any questions they had.

The subjects' responses were scored in this way: First, each response was scored as being prescriptive or proscriptive; the responses which indicated that the subject was rewarded for doing (e.g., "My parents are pleased when I do well in school") or punished for not doing (e.g., "My friends are upset with me when I am not helpful") were scored as being prescriptive; the responses which indicated that the subject was rewarded for not doing (e.g., "My parents are happy with me when I don't do poorly in school") or punished for doing (e.g., "My friends are upset with me when I forget about them") were scored as proscriptive.

The values for the ratings were simply the numbers

the subjects marked as indicating their sureness of their responses.

The subjects were also asked to indicate their age and sex.

## RESULTS

In order to analyze these data each subject's responses were scored as being prescriptive or proscriptive and each subject was given three scores: two scores were the number of proscriptive responses when the subject used to complete the peer punishment stems and the parent punishment stems; the third score was a combination of the first two scores. The first two scores could be either 0, 1 or 2 and the third score could be either 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4.

An examination of the raw data (illustrated in Table 1) indicates that the majority of the stems were completed with proscriptive responses, that proscriptive responses were seen only slightly more frequently among parent stems than peer stems and that the number of proscriptive stems is lower among the older subjects than the

TABLE 1

FREQUENCY OF PROSCRIPTIVE RESPONSES TO PEER AND PARENT PUNISHMENT STEMS BY AGE

| Type of Stem | Grade 5 | Grade 8 | Grade 11 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Peer | 29 | 28 | 26 | 83 |
| Parent | 31 | 29 | 26 | 86 |
| Total | 60 | 57 | 57 | 169 |

NOTE: N = 57 (19 in each grade level); there were 2 peer stems and 2 parent stems.

younger subjects.

A three-by-two analysis of variance was performed using a modified repeated measures design (i.e., an A×(B×S) described in Keppell, 1973, pp. 433-442) to assess the differences between the three age groups and the two types of questions. This design was required because each subject in each of the three age groups responded to both the parent and peer stems. Subjects who provided a response which was both prescriptive and proscriptive (e.g., "My parents are upset with me when I don't pass my courses and when I do poorly in school") were excluded from the data analyses. Also, subjects were randomly withdrawn from the subject samples of grades eight and eleven to provide equal sample sizes for each of the three grade levels. This left nineteen subjects in each grade level.

The results of this analysis of variance indicated that the differences between the parent and peer questions and the age groups were not significant ($f(1,54) = 0.264$, $p < 0.05$, $f(2,56) = 0.8864$, $p < 0.05$ for peer and parent differences and age differences respectively). The interaction between these two variables was also insignificant. A summary of these results can be found in Table 2.

The subjects' ratings of their sureness were also compared to determine if there was a difference between their sureness of peer and parent questions and between age groups. The mean ratings (illustrated in Table 3) indicate more sureness of parent-stem completions than

TABLE 2

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF SUBJECTS' RESPONSES TO PEER AND PARENT STEMS

| Sources | SS | df | MS | F | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 0.89 | 2 | 0.445 | 0.8864 | >0.05 |
| S/A | 27.11 | 54 | 0.502 | | |
| B | 0.1 | 1 | 0.1 | 0.264 | >0.05 |
| A×B | 0.01 | 2 | 0.005 | 0.01323 | >0.05 |
| B×S/A | 20.39 | 54 | 0.3779 | | |
| Total | 48.5 | 113 | | | |

NOTE: N = 57, 19 subjects per grade level; A = grade, B = peer or parent question.

TABLE 3

MEAN SURENESS OF SUBJECTS' REPONSES TO PEER AND PARENT STEMS BY GRADE

| Type of Stem | Grade 11 | Grade 8 | Grade 5 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Peer | 2.0 | 2.44 | 1.92 | 2.12 |
| Parent | 1.65 | 1.5 | 1.57 | 1.57 |
| Total | 3.65 | 3.94 | 3.5 | 3.7 |

NOTE: N = 57, 19 per grade level.

peer stem completion. A three-by-two analysis of variance was used to determine if these differences, the differences between age groups and the interaction of age and types of stem were significant. Again, a modified repeated subjects design was used. The differences between the age groups were not significant ($f(2,54) = 0.6039$, $p < 0.05$), the differences between the sureness of peer and parents stems were significant ($f(1,54) = 18.58$, $p < 0.001$) and the interaction between these two variables approached significance ($f(2,54) = 2.58$, $0.05 < p < 0.10$). (A summary of these results is presented in Table 4.) Further analyses of the subjects' sureness ratings were performed to determine if there were differences within the peer and parent stems by age and to determine if the differences between peer and parent stems occurred at all ages. The analysis of variance was used to compare the three grade levels' ratings of their sureness of their responses. There were no significant differences between their ratings of the parent stems ($f(2,54) = 0.638$, $p < 0.05$); the differences between their sureness of the peer stems was close to significance ($f(2,54) = 2.57$, $p < 0.10$). T-tests were used to compare peer and parent ratings within each grade level. All the subjects who participated in this study were included in these computations. The subjects were more sure of their parent-stem completions than their peer-stem completions at all grade levels except grade five ($T = 2.14$, $df = 24$, $p = 0.014$; $T = 2.52$, $df = 20$, $p = 0.02$; $T = 1.62$, $df = 15$,

TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR SUBJECTS' SURENESS RATINGS

| Sources | SS | df | MS | F | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 3.9122 | 2 | 1.9501 | 0.6039 | >0.05 |
| S/A | 174.9 | 54 | 3.2388 | | |
| B | 33.7196 | 1 | 33.7196 | 18.5803 | <0.001 |
| A×B | 9.39 | 2 | 4.695 | 2.58706 | <0.01 |
| B×S/A | 98 | 54 | 1.8148 | | |

NOTE: N = 57, 19 per grade level; A = grade, B = peer or parent question.

p = 0.10; for grades 11, 8 and 5 respectively).

# DISCUSSION

In this section I would like to discuss three issues:

1) The difficulties of interpreting these results in light of methodological limitations

2) How these results compare with other theories or notions about parent child or peer interactions

3) Suggestions of how these hypotheses may be more adequately evaluated

Perhaps the most distressing part of this study is the low reliability of the measures, particularly the measures of the peer values orientation and the subjects' ratings of the sureness of their responses. The reliability of the values orientations was limited by two factors: a low number of items used in each measure and an abnormal distribution of the data. There were only two items used in each measure. The responses were scored dichotomously (i.e., as being either prescriptive or proscriptive) and the distributions were negatively skewed (i.e., in the direction of the proscriptive items). Having a small number of items makes it more difficult to account for the total variance and the skewed distributions limits the power of the statistical analysis. The reliability of the measures was determined by computing the correlation between the two items in each measure. Given the absence of a normal

distribution one could not find a very high correlation.

Although the data for the subjects' sureness of their responses weren't dichotomous their reliability was constrained by the same factors which limited the reliability of the values orientation. There were only two items in each measure and the data were more frequently observed at the low, or "sure," end of the scale. (See Figures 1 and 2.) The peer ratings were more normally distributed than the parent ratings.

One interesting aspect of the reliability of these measures is the higher reliability of the parent items than the peer items. The reliability of the peer items was only 0.0876, whereas the reliability of the parent items was 0.3728. The reliability of the values orientation was higher for the parent items, too. There may be a number of reasons for this. First, children have a limited number of parents while they have a large number of friends. It may be easier to provide reliable information about a limited number of persons (in this case parents) than a larger number of persons (in this case friends). That is, when the subjects were asked about their parents they needed to refer to only a small group of persons but when they were asked about their peers they needed to refer to a much larger group of persons. Perhaps this greater variability among their peers made it more difficult to make consistent responses about them.

Another important consideration may be the length of

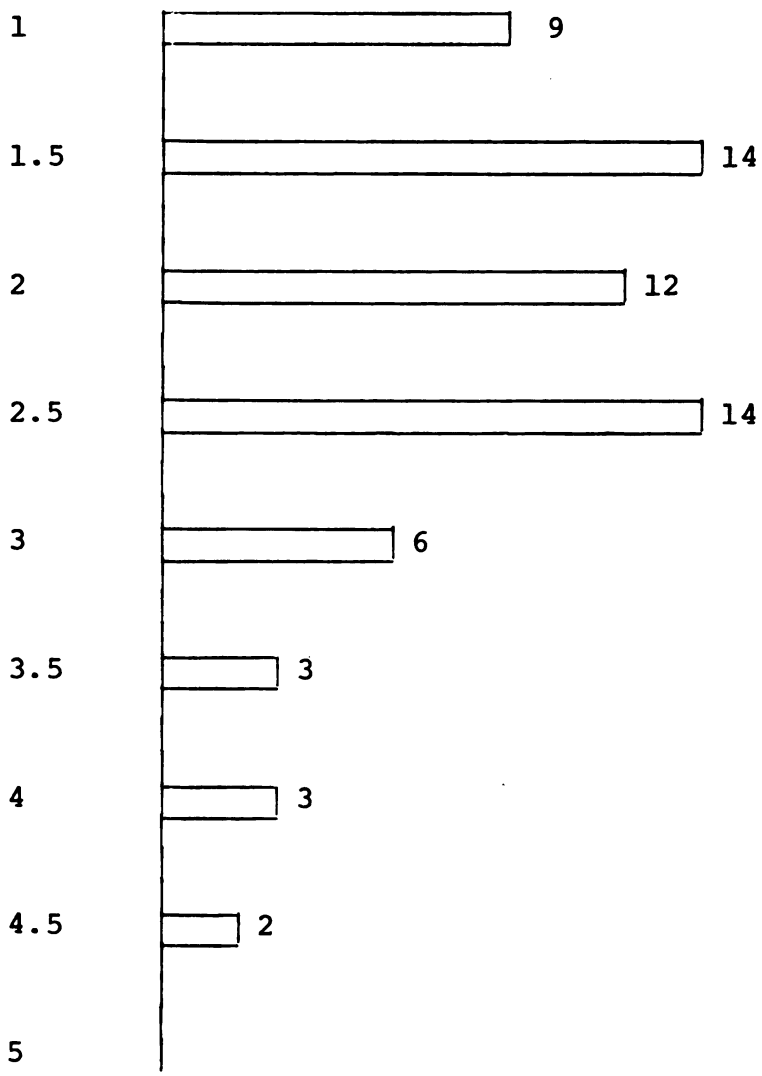


Figure 1. Distribution of mean peer ratings. The number following each line is the frequency of that response.

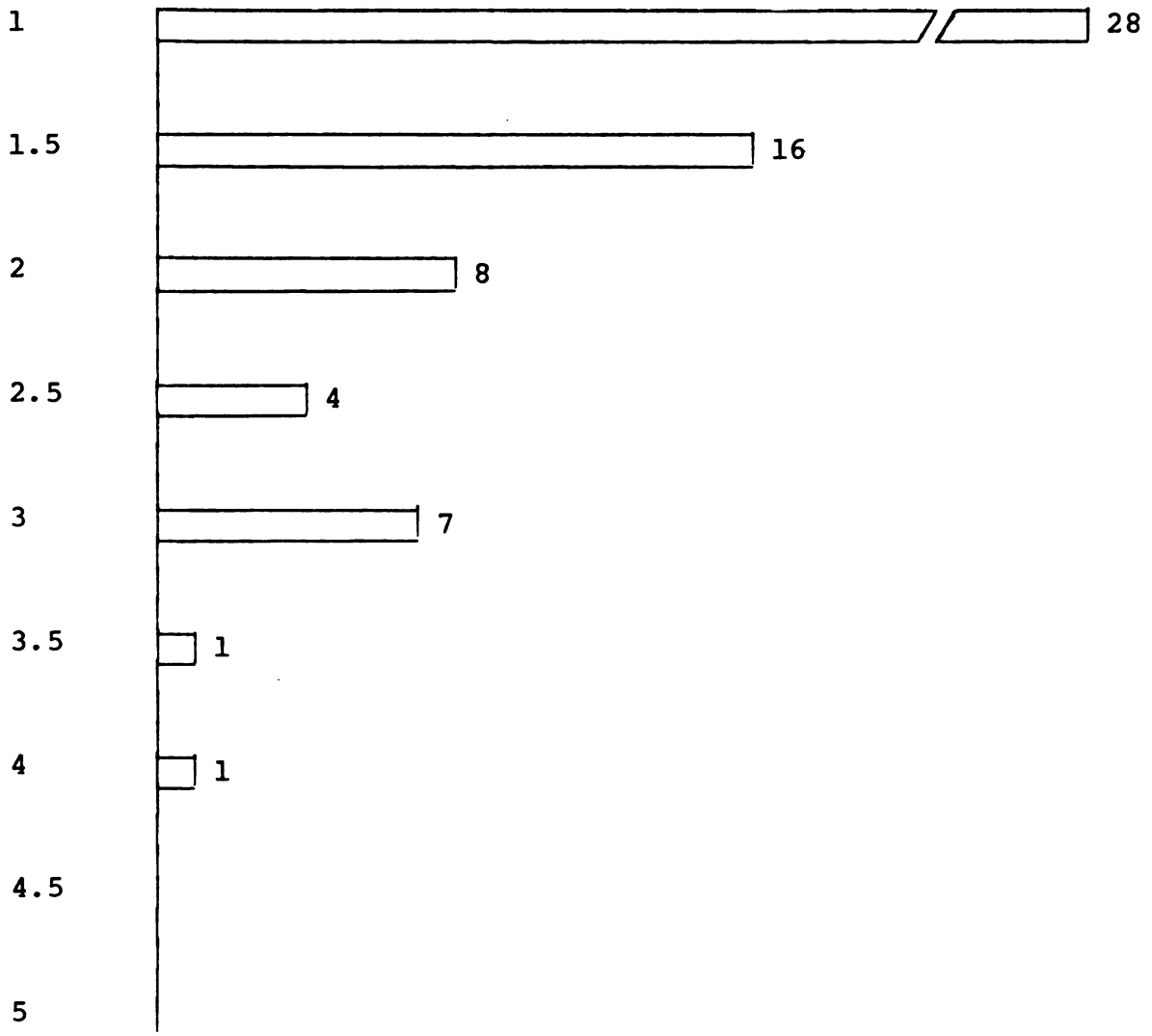


Figure 2. Distribution of mean parent ratings.

time that the subjects have known these two groups of persons. Clearly children have known their parents for a longer time than they have known their friends. This longer period of acquaintance may have helped the subjects to provide more reliable information about their parents than their peers.

Perhaps these difficulties also constrained the subjects' sureness of the peer responses. Since the subjects may have had more difficulty making general comments about their peers than their parents they may also be less sure of their responses to the peer items.

If the measure of the subjects' sureness of their peer responses had some validity one might expect to observe a change in this sureness with age. That is, children at one age may be more sure of their peer responses than children at other ages. Frequently, early adolescence has been considered to be a time when children are especially unsure about their interactions with their peers (Elkind, 1966, 1979; Sullivan, 1953; Dunphy, 1963). These persons have suggested that new issues have been introduced into the lives of children at this time and they have not yet become accustomed to them. One might expect that this unsureness may be reflected in the subjects' ratings of their sureness of the peer responses. It is conceivable that the grade-eight students would be less sure of their peer responses than the grade-five students (who haven't yet entered adolescence) and the grade-eleven students (who have become

accustomed to the new issues of adolescence). Although the mean rating of the grade-eight students was higher than the ratings made by the other two grades these differences fell short of significance. The average rating for grade eight was 2.44 while the averages for grades five and eleven were 1.91 and 2.0 respectively ($F = 2.57$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.085$). The power of the analysis of variance, however, was limited by the absence of normal distributions of the grade-five and grade-eleven data; both distributions were extremely skewed. There were no differences on the parent ratings according to age ($F = 0.638$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.532$).

Another reason for the lower reliability and less-sure rating of the peer items may be a function of the quality of peer and parent interaction. Perhaps the consideration of a learning model for the development of values is more appropriate for parent-child interaction than peer interaction. Damon (1979), in a recent discussion of children's social interaction, noted that the parent-child relationship is frequently thought of as being one of authority whereas the peer interaction is characterized by friendship and sharing. In light of this it is doubtful that the notions of reward and punishment are equally salient for peer and parent items. Perhaps these issues are more important in parent-child interaction than in peer interaction. This may be a reason behind the differences in reliability and sureness.

It may be useful to consider these differences in

salience from the perspective of Kohlberg's ideas of the stages of moral "values" (1963). He suggests that young children judge the value of an act according to whether it is punished or how well it satisfied one's needs or desires. Later they base these decisions on social norms and standards; punishment and instrumental satisfaction have lost their importance. According to this model, and the age-related trends associated with it, reward and punishment may be important to young children whereas norms and social standards become important for older children. This may explain why this model seemed more reliable for the parent-child interaction that peer interaction.

It is interesting to note that Freud applied his notions of reward and punishment in the ego ideal and conscience (as interpreted by Hill, 1960) to the parent-child interaction and other interactions where some type of hierarchy existed (e.g., between children and coaches, teachers, etc.) but not to peers (Brenner, 1963).

The results of this study are consistent with the results of one other previous study. The frequencies of the prescriptive and proscriptive responses in this study resembled the results obtained by McKinney in his original investigation of these values orientations. The subjects of this study completed over 70% of the punishment stems with proscriptive responses, whereas McKinney's subjects completed 63% of the punishment stems with proscriptive responses.

Although the procedures of this study have yielded some interesting results which are consistent with other findings in the literature they were unable to adequately assess the validity of the hypotheses. Clearly if these hypotheses are to be properly examined a different strategy should be used. In light of the difficulties posed by uneven distributions of the data and low numbers of items one might hope that increasing the number of items would be a sufficient solution to these problems. However, it is doubtful that this type of change would be an adequate solution. First, the addition of items would probably increase the possibility of a response set and increase the probability that the subjects will recognize the purpose of the study. With only two items some subjects recognized that some questions were asked more than once. For example, an eleventh-grade subject who had come to the second parent stem which read "My parents are disappointed with me when I . . ." (he had already completed the first parent stem, which read, "My parents are upset with me when I . . .") completed the second stem in this way: "My parents are disappointed with me when I answer a question twice." Also, I spoke with a fifth grader just after he completed the sentence stems. I asked him if he had enjoyed participating in this study. He replied that he had but he was a bit concerned that I had attempted to confuse him. I asked him what he meant and he said, "You asked some of the questions

more than once."

Second, the distribution may not acquire a more-normal distribution by merely adding more items. In this study neither parent item had a normal distribution. The responses which each subject made on each item were combined to create a new score. The distribution of these data was no less skewed than the distribution of two items alone.

Perhaps a completely different method would be needed. One possibility would be to ask a group of children to rank a number of issues which are relevant to either peer interaction or parent-child interaction. Each issue would be provided in prescriptive and proscriptive form. For example, an issue in parent-child interaction may be "being neat" or "not being sloppy." The subjects would be asked to rank them according to their importance within that type of relationship. The dependent measure would be the average rank assigned to each item. The experimenter would examine these ranks to determine if the prescriptive and proscriptive items were regarded as being equally important.

Another way of investigating this relationship would be to simply ask children to list ten things that would upset their friends and ten things that would upset their parents. The dependent measure would be the number of prescriptive and proscriptive items mentioned by the subjects.

Although the hypotheses of this study were not supported it would be difficult to say at this time that

they have no validity. The results were insignificant but in all cases they were in the predicted direction. This lack of significance may be a function of methodological constraints on the data. Or it may be that the learning model upon which McKinney has based his notion of prescriptive and proscriptive values is salient for parent-child interactions but lacks validity in peer interaction.

Another issue which must be examined more thoroughly is the assumption on which the hypotheses of this paper are based. It was assumed that young children seemed to be operating within a proscriptive system while older children were oriented toward a prescriptive system. This notion was based on inferences from the results of two studies. These studies involved two select groups of subjects (one group was high in needs of social approval and the other included two groups of women who may have been from widely different populations: one was a group of seventh graders, and the other was a group of college students); the results of both studies may not be easily generalizable to other populations.

In fact, one part of the literature would suggest that the assumption of this change from a proscriptive to a prescriptive system may be either too simplistic or even wrong. Children's tendencies to help may be an indication of the prescriptiveness of their orientations. If the assumption of an increase or prescriptiveness is true then one should observe an age-related increase in helping.

Staub (1970), however, found that helping was related to age in a curvilinear manner. Using a distress situation similar to the one described earlier in this paper he noted that children in grade 4 help more than children in either grade six or grade two. Indeed, the notion that young children consider their world to be proscriptive while older children consider it to be prescriptive should be adequately assessed.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## PARENTAL PERMISSION LETTER

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a graduate student studying developmental psychology at Michigan State University. I am currently studying how children develop values. In order to complete this study I would like to have your son/daughter to complete a questionnaire for me. It should take them about 30 minutes to do this.

If you child is to participate in this study you will have to give them written permission to do so. In order that you can understand what I will ask them to do I would like to explain to you the procedures of this study.

In this study the participants will be asked to complete 30 sentence stems and rate how sure they are of their response. An example of a sentence stem might be:

When I meet a new person I try to . . .

Possible responses might be " . . . to act friendly" or " . . . not act foolish." Next they will be asked to rate, on a five-point scale, how sure they are of their answer. On the scale a child who was very sure of his response would circle 1 and a child who is very unsure would make number 5. A child who is some place in-between would circle

2, 3, or 4.

The questions I would like to ask your children are very similar to the one in the example. They will be given clear instructions and asked to be as honest as possible. Also, they will be assured that there are no right or wrong answers. All participants will be free to stop whenever they like. All responses will be treated with strict confidence and your child will participate anonymously. After they have completed the questionnaire I will explain the experiment to them. The full results of the study will be available upon request.

This study has been approved by the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects and by the principal of your child's school. I am conducting it under the supervision of Dr. John McKinney, Department of Psychology at MSU.

If you have any questions please call me at 353-8418 or 337-8096.

Please sign below if you will permit your child to participate. Thank you for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,

William M. Bukowski, Jr.

# APPENDIX B

## INCOMPLETE SENTENCE STEMS AND QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUCTIONS

AGE_____ GRADE_____ SEX: MALE FEMALE

Below are the beginning of 30 sentences. In front of each one is a scale going from 1 to 5. Here's what I'd like you to do: Read the sentence beginning carefully and then finish it so it is a complete sentence. For example, if the sentence beginning was "I like summer," two ends for this sentence might be "because it is hot" or "because I don't have to go to school." After you have completed the sentence mark on the scale how sure you are of your response. If you are very sure circle the number 1 on the scale; if you are very unsure circle the number 5. If you are sure but not very sure circle the number 2; if you are unsure but not very unsure circle the number 4. If you are neither sure nor unsure circle the number 3. Remember to read each sentence. Be sure to be true to your own feelings.

1.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure I am satisfied with myself when I

2.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My friends are upset with me when I

3.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure If I show my teacher my work I

4.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My father is happy with me when I

5.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure If a young child meets me on the street

6.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure People help me when

7.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My parents are disappointed with me when I

8.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure Good television shows

9.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My mother is upset with me when I

10.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure I call my friends on the phone when I

11.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsrue My parents are pleased with me when I

12.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure When I meet a new person I

13.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My parents are happy with me when I

14.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure People trust each other when

15.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure If I work hard I

16.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My friends are disappointed with me when I

17.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure In autumn I like to

18.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My father is upset with me when I

19.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure The thing I like best about school is

20.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My friends are happy with me when I

21.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure Public officials usually

22.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure Famous people always

23.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My parents are upset with me when

24.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure When I am happy I

25.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure If I ask someone for a favor I

26.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My parents are pleased with me when I

27.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure I especially like to

28.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure The nice thing about winter is

29.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure My mother is happy with me when I

30.) sure 1--2--3--4--5 unsure People are careless when they

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