

# The Social Domain Approach to Children's Moral and Social Judgments

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

This chapter addresses several central issues in the study of moral and social development. First, a fundamental issue, and one on which different theoretical approaches diverge, is how to define the scope and nature of morality. Social domain theory takes as a given that children—even young ones—actively strive to interpret and make sense of their social world. Furthermore, it is assumed that children's social interactions and experiences lead to the construction of three developmentally and conceptually distinct forms of social knowledge (moral, societal, and psychological). This approach differs from structural–developmental stage models of moral judgment, which have described moral development in terms of the gradual differentiation of moral principles of justice or rights from nonmoral concerns regarding conventions, pragmatics, and prudence (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Piaget, 1932/1965). Social domain theory also differs from recent approaches which have treated reasoning and emotions as dualities, defining morality as

largely emotional, nonrational, and based on implicit processes (e.g., Haidt, 2001). As Turiel (2010) has stated, “Thought and emotions are not independent pieces of a puzzle. . . . [They] are interdependent parts of a whole. Emotions are not so powerful and thinking so weak that emotions dominate reasoning” (p. 557). As described in more detail later, social domain theory views emotions as deeply intertwined with and inseparable from moral reasoning and views emotional appraisals and emotional reactions as part and parcel of moral judgments (Turiel & Killen, 2010).

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

## Foundations, Theoretical Background, and Definitions of Key Terms

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

But morality is only one aspect of children’s developing social knowledge. Moral concerns with justice, welfare, and rights are seen as developmentally and conceptually distinct from concerns regarding societal arrangements, social organization, and social norms and customs. Social conventions are currently the most extensively studied aspect of the societal domain, although recent research has also investigated other facets, such as group identity and group functioning (see Killen and Cooley’s chapter, this volume). Social conventions facilitate the smooth and efficient functioning of social systems by providing

expectations for appropriate behavior. Drawing from philosophical perspectives (Lewis, 1969; Searle, 1969), conventions are defined as consensually determined uniformities, expectations, or rules that coordinate individuals' interactions within different social systems (Turiel, 1983).

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

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

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

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

Moral, societal, and psychological concepts each constitute organized systems or domains of social knowledge that arise from children's experiences with different types of regularities in the social environment and follow separate developmental trajectories (Nucci & Gingo, 2011; Turiel, 1983, 2006). Moreover, they are distinct early in development. Thus, social domain researchers claim that a full understanding and appreciation of

the complexity and diversity of social life must include assessments of moral knowledge as distinct from other types of social knowledge because concerns with others' rights and welfare (morality), the importance of maintaining traditions and group goals (social conventions), and personal choice, personal entitlements, and autonomy (personal issues) all may coexist in individuals' judgments.

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

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

Variations in how events are construed also may be due to differences in children's descriptive understanding of the nature of reality, or their *informational assumptions*. Informational assumptions come from many sources, including science and religion, and are typically accepted and taken for granted, although the facts may change (for instance, when scientific knowledge advances); differ among individuals, religious or ethnic groups, and cultures (for instance, as in beliefs about effective childrearing practices); and often are highly contested (as in the case of arguments about when personhood begins; Smetana, 1982). Studies by Wainryb (reviewed in Wainryb & Brehl, 2006) have demonstrated that children consistently take into account both moral and factual beliefs when making moral judgments, and these inform their judgments of tolerance, or their evaluations of the legitimacy of beliefs different from their own. Factual or informational beliefs also have been found to inform real-life decision making about controversial social issues such as abortion, through their influence in structuring judgments (Smetana, 1982; Turiel et al., 1991). For instance, research has shown that individuals may view abortion decisions as

moral matters or as personal issues depending on their assumptions about whether or not the fetus should be ascribed full personhood (Smetana, 1982).

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

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

## **Current Research**

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

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

As noted previously, early research from the social domain perspective focused on providing empirical support for the claim that children of different ages identify moral, conventional, and personal judgments using hypothesized criteria. This research focused on evaluations of hypothetical situations that are considered prototypical of the domains.

Thus, in this research, straightforward moral events, such as when one child intentionally hits another child, are presented as not in conflict with other types of goals, motivations, or events.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Moral Judgments and Theory of Mind*

Researchers have drawn on the large body of research on children's developing theory of mind to examine the role of psychological knowledge in making moral judgments (Wainryb & Brehl, 2006). Much research has focused on children's false belief understanding, or the appreciation that others may have beliefs that differ from reality and one's own, which develops around 4 to 5 years of age. For instance, Flavell, Mumme, Green, and Flavell (1992) found that children at this age, but not before, grasped that others may have factual, moral, conventional, value, and property ownership beliefs that differ from the child's own beliefs.

Children's acceptance and tolerance for beliefs different from their own, however, varies by domain. For instance, Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam, and Lewis (2004) found that 5- to 9-year olds uniformly rejected the notion that there is more than one right belief about moral or factual matters, but they were more accepting of divergent personal preferences (for instance, whether chocolate ice cream tastes yucky or yummy); their acceptance of different personal preferences increased with age. Wainryb and Ford (1998) presented 3- to 7-year olds with hypothetical stories depicting actors engaging in harmful practices on the basis of different moral or factual beliefs. As in Flavell et al. (1992), these researchers found that 3-year olds evaluated all harmful acts as unacceptable regardless of the nature of their beliefs. When children began to understand that others may have different informational beliefs (i.e., false beliefs), however, they were more accepting of unfair practices based on those factual assumptions, while judging acts based on different moral beliefs to be categorically wrong. Thus, coming to appreciate others' divergent factual beliefs may lead to greater tolerance for different cultural practices but not to moral relativism (Wainryb & Ford, 1998).

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

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

This shift in children's thinking about mental states also is evident in their evaluations of real-life moral experiences. Wainryb et al.'s (2005) study of children's narratives of past moral conflicts found that compared to older children and adolescents, preschoolers rarely



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

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

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

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

### *Neurological Correlates of Moral Judgments*

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

### *Morality and Emotion*

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

Research has shown that moral and conventional transgressions elicit different types of responses from peers and adults (see Smetana 2006, 2013, for reviews). For instance, observational studies in the home and at school have shown that parents and teachers focus on the emotional repercussions of moral transgressions for victims, emphasizing the consequences of harm or unfairness for the victim and encouraging transgressors to take the victim's perspective. Additionally, the victims of moral transgressions respond with emotional reactions like crying, which serve to highlight the harmful ramifications

of transgressions. In contrast, when responding to conventional transgressions, authority figures appeal to rules and social order, and at least until middle childhood, other children rarely respond. Thus, the emotional consequences for victims influence children's evaluations and responses to transgressions.

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

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

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

Social domain research has not directly considered the role of emotions such as guilt, empathy, sympathy, and personal distress, or children's ability to regulate emotions in making judgments. But Arsenio's research program has shown that a concern for others, along with other emotions evoked by moral violations, may help children make distinctively moral evaluations. This view is supported by research examining whether empathic concern and the ability to correctly identify emotion cues are associated with moral and conventional judgments in adult patients with frontotemporal dementia (fvFTD; Lough

et al., 2006). FvFTD is characterized by inappropriate social behavior, loss of empathy, and difficulty in understanding complex tasks. Compared to controls, individuals with fvFTD did not differentiate between the permissibility and severity of moral and conventional transgressions and displayed deficits in their comprehension of emotions (e.g., low ratings of empathic concern and impairment in their ability to recognize emotions of anger and disgust). These findings further highlight the potential role of emotions in identifying and differentiating moral versus conventional events.

### *Coordinations Between Moral and Other Social Concepts*

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

#### Morality and Intergroup Attitudes

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

Killen et al. (2001) found that, based on conventional reasons, younger preschool children chose to include the gender-stereotypic child more often than did older children. Additionally, when asked to reconsider their choices following probes focusing on different reasons than their original response (i.e., those who chose to include the nonstereotypic child were probed with conventional concerns and vice versa), children changed their decisions more when probed regarding moral concerns with fairness following conventional choices than the reverse. Thus, changes in judgments depended on whether a

moral point of view was being advocated. Children were not always able to simultaneously consider the competing demands of the situation, but they were able to weigh multiple considerations (and typically give priority to morality) when different perspectives were introduced.

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

### Morality and Rights

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

The studies suggest that compared to early adolescents, older adolescents are better able to integrate and coordinate their understanding of laws restricting civil liberties with concepts of rights. Furthermore, how children applied rights in different social contexts differed with age. In middle childhood, children made few distinctions between the rights of children and adults or between rights applied in family, school, and the society at large (Helwig, 1997, 1998). With age, adolescents considered agents' maturity or mental or physical competence and increasingly differentiated between rights that should be accorded to children versus adults and the rights applicable in different social contexts.

Similar age trends have been obtained in non-Western contexts, including studies of Druze Arab early and late adolescents and adults (Turiel & Wainryb, 1998) and in related research on democratic versus authority-based decision making in China (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2001).

### Morality and Sexual Identity

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

### Gender, Hierarchy, and Inequality

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

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

(such as the importance of traditions or the need to adhere to authority or cultural norms) but also pragmatic concerns regarding the possibly deleterious consequences of doing so.

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

### Adolescent-Parent Relationships

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

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

Furthermore, a recent study assessing adolescents' and parents' ratings of the acceptability of different strategies for keeping information from parents found that although both viewed deceptive strategies (such as telling parents only if asked, omitting important details, avoiding the topic, or lying) as relatively unacceptable, adolescents viewed them as more acceptable than their parents (Rote & Smetana, 2012). For prudential issues like



drinking alcohol or texting while driving, both parents and adolescents viewed telling only if asked as the most acceptable strategy, followed by avoidance and omitting important details, and, least of all, lying. Parents made these same distinctions in evaluating the acceptability of not disclosing multifaceted issues (like staying out past curfew and what teens post on Facebook) and personal issues (like how free time or allowance money are spent), but adolescents viewed all of these alternative nondisclosure strategies as more acceptable than lying. This reflected their attempts to balance their desires for greater autonomy with preserving their relationship with parents.

### *Implications for Moral Development*

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

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

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

Although there has been less research on how moral and psychological knowledge intersect in middle childhood and adolescence, there is some evidence to suggest that advances in children's moral thinking may be due in part to children's growing ability to consider mitigating circumstances and others' intentions, motivations, and goals. During the elementary school years, children acquire a more sophisticated understanding that victims' behavior in response to moral transgressions (for instance, when victims do not show visible signs of distress, such as in situations of compliance or subversion rather than opposition or resistance) may not accurately reflect their psychological states or internal feelings (Shaw & Wainryb, 2006). Children also become less accepting of hypothetical transgressions that are described as provoked by others and view retaliation as less morally justified. Smetana, Campione-Barr, and Yell (2003) found that fourth graders condemned



retaliation using moral reasons more than first graders did, although all children viewed "in kind" retaliation as more acceptable than retaliation that is greater in magnitude than the original offense. When narrating past experiences as a victim rather than a perpetrator (Wainryb et al., 2005), elementary school-age children were more likely to describe harm as intentional and the perpetrator as wanting to harm or anger them. In contrast, perpetrators typically described their behavior as a response to provocation. With age, however, children more frequently referred to misunderstandings, mitigating circumstances, and negligence, leading to more subtle and complex moral judgments. The use of within-subjects designs in these studies provides compelling evidence that differences in victims' and perpetrators' responses reflect different perspective on situations rather than pervasive and consistent individual differences.

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

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

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

A similar U-shaped pattern of growth was found in a recent longitudinal study of adolescents' perceptions of the government's right to intervene in or regulate potentially risky behaviors (Flanagan, Stout, & Gallay, 2008). Both cross-sectional and longitudinal results revealed that middle adolescents were less likely than early or late adolescents to believe that society had the right to control individuals' involvement in risky behaviors.

Like Nucci and Turiel (2009), these researchers found that middle adolescence was characterized by an overextension of the personal domain and a strong commitment to personal rights as a basis for making decisions. Reflecting advances in thinking, however, late adolescents coordinated their beliefs in individual rights with an understanding of the role of government to constrain individuals' rights in the interest of a larger public good.

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

### *Directions for Future Research*

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

In light of the ongoing debates regarding the role of intuitions versus reasoning in everyday moral decision making, there is a need for more empirical research on the interrelationships between emotions and moral judgments, particularly on the role of positive emotions such as sympathy, empathy, and respect. Developmental research has been largely absent from discussions about the role of intuitions on judgment (e.g., Haidt, 2001). This is surprising in light of the fact that many of the rapid, seemingly intuitive decisions and actions made by adults often have their origins in developmental processes involving conscious and deliberate thought and reflection occurring during childhood and adolescence (Smetana & Killen, 2008; Turiel, 2010; Turiel & Killen, 2010; see Turiel, this volume).

In addition, there has been considerable research on the role of emotions such as guilt, empathy, or sympathy in other areas of moral development (see Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Morris, and Malti & Ongley, this volume); this research could be fruitfully integrated into the social domain view to help elucidate how different emotions animate and inform the early development and processing of moral judgments.

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

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

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# Handbook of Moral Development

Second Edition

*Edited by Melanie Killen and Judith G. Smetana*

[2014]

 Psychology Press  
Taylor & Francis Group  
NEW YORK AND LONDON