Adolescents use emotional evaluations and moral judgments in the context of intergroup social exclusion.

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Moral judgments and emotions: Adolescents' evaluations in intergroup social exclusion contexts

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REASONING AND EMOTION in humans are often conceptualized as opposite ends of a spectrum, with emotions perceived as instinctual, reflexive, or automatic and reasoning perceived as learned, deliberate, or intentional. However, in contrast to this dichotomous perspective, considerable research supports the view that emotions and reasoning are reciprocal and complementary, and both play important roles as sources of information and the basis for judgments and action in morally relevant social contexts.[1] We propose that emotions and judgments are linked in children's and adolescents' social interpretations of events in daily life. Experiencing an emotion often involves a cognitive appraisal of a situation, and subsequent appraisals are reciprocally influenced by emotional experiences. Both emotions and judgments are important for understanding the development of morality in adolescence, particularly in complex social contexts in which group membership and allegiance are in contrast to morally relevant decisions, like the exclusion of an individual from a social group.[2]

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Adolescence is often characterized as a time of emotional turbulence, hormonal changes, and teen rebellion against parents. However, this perspective fails to account for the reflection and development of ideologies that occur during this period.[3] Adolescence is also a time when youth establish a strong sense of group affiliation that has significant implications for their developing principles of fairness, justice, and equality.[4] However, not enough research has examined the reciprocal nature of moral judgments and emotions during adolescence, and even less work has examined these variables in a social exclusion context.[5]

Throughout development, emotions are central to making morally relevant evaluations and attributions in social contexts.[6] Emotions provide important information when reading social cues, recalling experiences, and deciding how to respond in social interactions.[7] As peer contexts become increasingly meaningful in adolescence, youth begin to weigh moral and emotional judgments in complex ways as issues of group identity and group loyalty are brought to bear on morally salient decisions.[8]

In this article, we first review current research on the role of emotions in moral judgments during adolescence, highlighting work that sheds new light on the complex context of intergroup social exclusion. We then explore new directions for future research on intergroup social exclusion in adolescence that draw on the increasing salience of group membership in youth and the consequences of individual resistance to group norms. We introduce a research agenda focused on understanding young people's moral judgments and emotions in these complex social contexts.

Developmental origins of moral judgments and emotions

Adolescents' evaluations of others' emotional states and anticipations of the effects of social interactions or moral violations are key to moral development as these emotional judgments pertain to

issues of fairness, justice, harm, and rights. To understand the relationship between emotions and judgments in adolescence, it is valuable to understand the precursors or building blocks, that is, the foundations of morality prior to adolescence.

From a young age, sympathy and empathy emerge as components of early morality that involve both emotions and judgments.[9] From as young as fourteen months, infants and young children have been shown to demonstrate empathy and sympathy and to cooperate with peers and adults who share a common goal.[10] For example, toddlers' emotional responses (facial, vocal, and gestural expressions of concern) toward an individual feigning pain increase with age, suggesting that experiences of empathic arousal (especially within the context of adult guidance) promote moral development.[11]

Research suggests that young children understand moral behavior through experience with negative emotions such as guilt, fear, and anxiety.[12] However, research also indicates that a wider range of emotions (not only negative feelings) is important for children's social-emotional and moral growth.[13] Thus, there is clear evidence for the coexistence of both positive (favorability, pride, happiness) and negative emotions in children's lives and for the relevance of both in the acquisition of morality. In the next section, we explore how emotions and judgments are interwoven in adolescents' evaluations of complex social exchanges, particularly exchanges that involve exclusion and intergroup attitudes.

Social exclusion: Types and consequences

Peer rejection and social exclusion, ubiquitous throughout childhood and adolescence, present a critical context to examine social, moral, and emotional development. One type of research on peer rejection in childhood and adolescence focuses on interpersonal social exclusion. In this context, individual differences such as temperament and social-emotional traits contribute to maladaptive peer relationships and the rejection of one individual by another.[14]

In instances of interpersonal social exclusion, the rejected individual is described as shy, fearful, or lacking in social skills, and the individual who initiates the rejection is one who habitually engages in bullying and is often found to be extremely aggressive. As a consequence of exclusion, rejected children and adolescents suffer from depression, loneliness, social withdrawal, and poor academic achievement.[15]

Witnessing the exclusion of an individual from a group can elicit emotional responses of empathy or sympathy in adolescence, but understanding the context and criteria for exclusion is essential for determining the moral relevance of the act.[16] In some cases, an act of rejection that is interpreted as interpersonal by one person could be interpreted as intergroup by another, and would be a wrong appraisal. For example, rejecting a peer from a swim team may involve interpersonal rejection; however, if the team is ethnic majority and the excluded member is ethnic minority, then the context creates a different factor, which is also intergroup (not just interpersonal). As an illustration, an adolescent might feel empathy for a poor swimmer who is excluded from a high school varsity swim team but also view this exclusion as legitimate. In contrast, the same adolescent might feel empathy for a black student who is excluded from the swim team because of a belief that black people cannot swim and also view this type of exclusion as discriminatory and thus morally wrong. Research has provided evidence for this distinction in terms of individuals' affective responses to exclusion and subsequent emotional judgments of the excluding group. For example, Nesdale et al. examined social exclusion on the basis of school membership (intergroup exclusion) and perceived drawing talent (interpersonal exclusion) with a sample of six- and eight-year-old Australian children.[17] Participants who were rejected for an intergroup reason (school membership) reported greater dislike of the rejecting group than children who were rejected for an interpersonal (drawing talent) reason. Although both types of social exclusion caused distress for participants, this study highlights the importance of affective experiences and social-cognitive judgments in

determining the moral relevance of exclusion in intergroup contexts.

In contrast to research on interpersonal rejection, research on intergroup exclusion addresses the macro, societal-level structures of prejudice, bias, power, and status that emerge early in childhood and result in group-based rejection.[18] The emotional consequences of exclusion on the basis of group membership are severe, as individuals under these circumstances experience discrimination and rejection as a result of stereotypes, prejudice, and bias that can lead to anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and academic risk factors.[19] Research on adolescents in the United States has indicated that experiences of discrimination based on racial/ethnic group membership differ across groups, with participants of Latin American and Asian backgrounds reporting more experiences of discrimination from adults and peers than their European American peers. Frequency of discrimination has been found to predict lower grade point average, lower self-esteem, and more depressive symptoms, distress, and physical complaints.[20] Furthermore, the existence and status of various types of groups in an individual's environment can also play a role in understanding the impact of discrimination on adolescent well-being. For example, Graham et al. found that for a sample of Latino and African American adolescents, self-blame (for one's own experience of social exclusion) partially explained the relationship between victimization and maladjustment when participants were members of the racial/ethnic majority at their school but not when participants were members of the racial/ethnic minority.[21]

The caustic consequences of discrimination underscore the importance of understanding adolescents' emotions, evaluations, and social-cognitive reasoning about discrimination in their lives. Youths' understanding and perceptions of discrimination are shaped by age-related changes in their cognitive skills as they shift from a focus on the relation between individuals' intergroup biases and their discriminatory behavior to acknowledgment of the role of society and the unjust systems of oppression that perpetuate discrimination.[22]

Intergroup social exclusion in adolescence: A theoretical model

When young people make decisions about social exclusion or evaluate the exclusion decisions of others, they integrate their affective experiences, social-cognitive attributions of the emotions and intentions of others, and moral reasoning capabilities. Although adolescence is often characterized as a period of group conformity, research indicates that with age, youth become increasingly aware of the moral and emotional consequences of social exclusion on the basis of group membership, strengthening their evaluation of such exclusion as wrong.[23] In this section, we highlight recent research on intergroup social exclusion in adolescence that illustrates how emotions and moral judgments intertwine in this context.

Killen and her colleagues have investigated intergroup social exclusion by drawing on social domain theory as well as social identity theory and identifying a new perspective, which they refer to as a social reasoning developmental model.[24] Traditionally, social domain theory identified three domains as central to social evaluations of everyday events:

- The moral domain, which refers to issues of justice, others' welfare, and rights, in which interindividual treatment results in a victim deprived of rights or resources
- The societal domain, which refers to conventions, traditions, and customs determined by social consensus and designed to make groups work well (these do not have moral consequences)
- The psychological domain, which refers to personal choice (decisions that are not regulated but viewed as a matter of individual preferences)[25]

Social identity theory provided a model for evaluating the degree to which an adolescent's group identity bears on his or her evaluations of intergroup social exclusion. In-group identity emer-

ges early in development and is related to out-group derogation in that motivation to enhance the in-group results in dislike of the out-group under conditions of threat. Developmental social identity research has shown that the degree to which a child or adolescent identifies with a group is related to his or her emerging prejudice and bias.[26]

Studies incorporating both social identity theory and social domain theory led to the social reasoning model, which expanded the content of the domain categories for the area of intergroup exclusion to include the wrongfulness of discrimination (*moral*), group functioning and group identity (*societal*), and intentionality (*psychological*) that is central to the social evaluations of multifaceted and complex events. Research has demonstrated that social exclusion is variably viewed as wrong (unfair), legitimate (for group functioning), or a personal choice. The contextual features that are related to different forms of reasoning include the complexity or ambiguity of a situation, along with other information, such as knowledge and prior experience, as well as group goals.[27] Research questions have pertained to the degree to which identification with a group is related to social reasoning about intergroup exclusion.[28] Furthermore, current research has also applied this model to group membership contexts beyond those of race and ethnicity and has expanded the study of intergroup social exclusion to the context of school groups, nationality, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.

Across samples of European American, African American, Asian American, Latin American, and multiracial adolescents, ratings of the wrongfulness of race-based social exclusion, for example, have been found to increase with age; participants judged such exclusion to be wrong on the moral grounds of unfair treatment. The role of group membership status, however, is significant in these contexts. When examining racial/ethnic minority and majority children's evaluations of race-based exclusion, racial/ethnic minority children were found to evaluate exclusion as more wrong than did racial/ethnic majority children.[29] A similar age-related pattern emerges with regard to adolescents' decisions regarding the acceptability of

excluding an individual from an activity on the basis of sexual orientation; such exclusion is viewed as increasingly wrong with age on the moral grounds of human equality and fairness.[30]

When examining multidimensional frameworks of group membership, adolescents demonstrate an increasing capacity to weigh the impact of exclusion based on different types of group membership. For example, Danish majority adolescents have been found to differentiate exclusion on the basis of gender and ethnicity, deeming exclusion based on gender to be more acceptable (for conventional reasons) than exclusion based on ethnicity (which was condemned for moral reasons).[31] Similarly, ethnic majority Dutch and minority Turkish adolescents have been found to judge the exclusion of someone who shared their gender and ethnicity to be worse than the exclusion of someone with whom they shared only one or no common in-group. These adolescents also evaluated excluders who shared their gender and ethnicity less harshly than excluders with whom they shared only one or no common in-group.[32] These results begin to elaborate the complexities of group dynamics in adolescence and the ways in which group membership influences adolescents' emotional and cognitive appraisals of intergroup social exclusion situations. Though the context is morally salient, decisions in such social situations are multifaceted.

Significant strides have been made toward understanding the reciprocal nature of reasoning and emotion in the morally salient context of intergroup social exclusion. However, few studies have directly assessed both judgments and emotions in the context of group-based social exclusion. One exception is a recent study by Malti, Killen, and Gasser in which both social cognition related to participants' evaluations of exclusion and emotional attributions to the individuals involved were directly examined in regard to exclusion on both an interpersonal and intergroup basis.[33] In this study, adolescents of native Swiss and other non-Swiss nationalities evaluated the exclusion of an individual on the basis of gender, nationality (Serbian or Swiss), or personality. Overall, exclusion based on nationality (a type of group membership) was judged to be less acceptable than exclusion based on personality (an individual char-

acteristic), and this distinction was particularly strong for non-Swiss participants. Participants overall thought that the individual who excluded another would feel pride, happiness, guilt, shame, and empathy, and the excluded individual would feel sadness and anger, but non-Swiss participants were noted to attribute more positive emotions to the excluding character than did Swiss participants. This study illustrated the interplay of emotions and cognitive judgments as young people consider the sensitive issue of exclusion on the basis of group membership.

The questions of group membership, multiple group membership, and group status make decisions regarding exclusion of an individual based on group affiliation complex. In addition to these variables, adolescents must also consider the current affective state of relations between groups. Intergroup relations are not always negative, and in fact the norms that a group has about attitudes toward and treatment of individuals from other groups have been found to be influential in individuals' perceptions of out-groups. Research on intergroup contact has established that intergroup interactions under conditions in which both groups share common goals and cooperate, and in which both groups have equal status and institutional/authority support, decrease biases and promote harmonious social relationships.[34]

These norms and affective states can be manipulated experimentally in order to understand their impact on several levels across development. For example, Anglo Australian children in an intergroup drawing competition relate differently to their competing team with age. Seven year olds reported dislike for the competing team in all cases except when their team held a norm of inclusion (liked people who were different) and the competing team was nonthreatening; in this case, seven year olds liked the competing team. In contrast, nine year olds were neutral toward the competing team in all cases except when their team held a norm of exclusion (did not like people who are different) and the competing team threatened the participant's team (said they were "out to get" them); in this case nine year olds disliked the competing team.[35] In sum, children as young as seven years of age are

able to coordinate information as nuanced as the emotional relations between groups, the moral norms that groups hold, and overarching social category memberships. These components of intergroup relations contribute to young people's perceptions and emotional evaluations of intergroup social exclusion.

Intergroup social exclusion: Adolescents' evaluations of group nonconformists

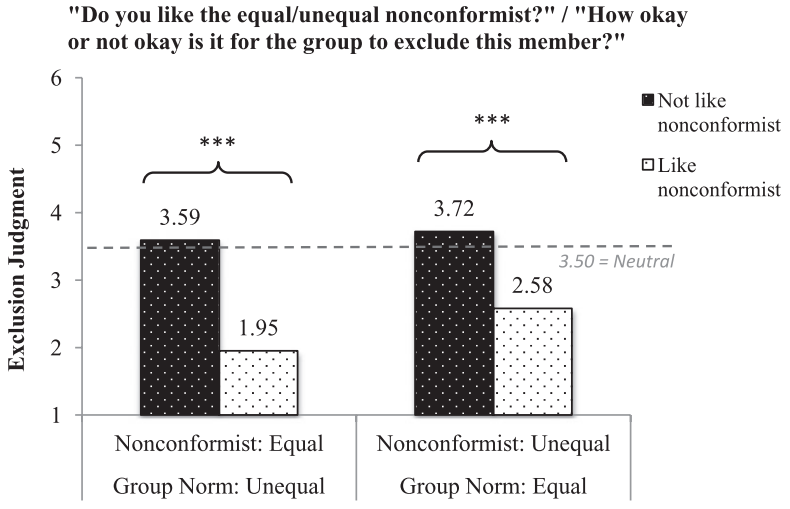
Research on social exclusion in adolescence that takes into account both moral reasoning and emotional attributions contributes to an especially rich understanding of the interplay of reasoning and emotion and bridges the gap between these often dissociated constructs in research on intergroup relations. Just as group membership cannot be reduced to an individual's identification with a single overarching societal grouping like race/ethnicity, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation, the decision about whether to exclude an individual from a group hinges on all of these factors, as well as the in-group and out-group attitudes or norms held by the groups in question.[36] Yet not all members of groups conform to group norms. When an individual's group loyalty is called into question (e.g., a member going against his or her group's norm), adolescents' capacity to recognize and evaluate that individual and his or her actions in the context of the group gives us greater insight into moral development in youth. Research in this domain investigates individuals' perceptions of group nonconformists, their actions, and what their group should do as a result. How do adolescents feel about individuals who dissent from (or do not conform to) a group's customs or beliefs? How do these feelings vary based on the moral relevance of the nonconformist's actions (Was he or she standing up against a negative group norm)? When do adolescents make the decision to exclude someone who is going against the norms of their group? How do these decisions and the reasons for them vary based on the moral relevance of the nonconformist's actions (Was he or she undercutting a positive group norm)?

It has been argued that social change comes about by resisting group norms that violate moral principles of fairness, justice, and rights.[37] Throughout adolescence, youth are confronted with groups in which norms and behavior are in contrast to the moral values of justice, fairness, and human rights. In these instances, when a group promotes inequality or injustice, deviance from such a group *is* morally warranted. Recent work by Killen et al. established a paradigm for investigating the interplay among the social norms of groups, exclusion decisions, and group identity.[38] Building from this paradigm, findings from Hitti et al. examined when youth judged the act of excluding a deviant member of a group as wrong and found that children and adolescents' own affective evaluations of the nonconformist predicted variance in their judgments of exclusion.[39]

To illustrate our points about emotions and moral judgments in an intergroup context, findings from Hitti et al. regarding the influence of group norms on adolescents' emotional evaluations of nonconformists and evaluations of exclusion will be briefly reviewed.[40] In this study, U.S. participants aged nine to ten years and thirteen to fourteen years were introduced to age- and gender-matched groups that held norms about moral issues pertaining to the distribution of important resources (money) and a nonconformist who went against the group norm by advocating the opposite perspective. Participants were asked how much they liked each nonconformist (individual favorability: "How much do you like or not like the nonconformist?"). How much participants like the target is an emotion-based evaluation in contrast to a moral judgment which refers to whether the act of exclusion is all right or not all right. As an example, one may like someone who does something that is viewed as wrong from a moral viewpoint; alternatively, one may dislike someone who does something that is viewed as right from a moral viewpoint. Thus, in addition to favorability assessments, participants were asked whether the act of exclusion was all right or not all right (acceptability of exclusion: "How okay or not okay is it for the group to exclude the nonconformist?").

In examining the relationship between how much participants liked a nonconformist and whether they thought it was acceptable to exclude that person, responses were linked such that participants who reported not liking the nonconformist also found it more acceptable for the group to exclude him or her (Figure 3.1). While participants found it more acceptable for the group to exclude a nonconformist if they themselves did not like this member, the degree of their acceptability varied by the type of nonconformist (or type of belief endorsed by the nonconformist). Participants who did not like the nonconformist who advocated for an unequal distribution, when the group held an equal norm, rated the group's decision to exclude that person significantly different from "neutral," suggesting that in this case, youth affirmed the group's decision to exclude. Thus, this unequal nonconformist, though he or she would advantage the group by suggesting that the person received more money than another group, went against the group's equal norm. Participants who did not like this member also felt that the group's decision to exclude the unequal nonconformist was warranted. Evaluations were different, however, for the

Figure 3.1. Emotional evaluations of group nonconformists and judgments about the act of exclusion



nonconformist who espoused equality. Youth who did not like the equal nonconformist evaluated the group's decision to exclude this member to be neutral: they did not accept or reject the group's decision to exclude. Perhaps this case presented a moral tension; here the nonconformist advocated for equal distribution of money (putting him or her in the moral right), yet doing so went against a group norm.

These results indicate a tension between the emotional evaluations of those who resist a group's norm and their judgments about the social exclusion of such individuals. In contrast to other work on intergroup social exclusion (referenced in the preceding sections), the young people in this study did not always exhibit increasing disapproval of social exclusion with age. In fact, no age findings were confirmed in these analyses. Both children and adolescents' feelings toward the nonconformist were not always in harmony with their opinions regarding the exclusion of that individual from the group, as evidenced by their evaluations of excluding an equal nonconforming group member.

Overall, these results suggest youth to be proficient at dually engaging norms about the expectations of their social group with the overarching moral norms of society. They recognized the tension between group norms and societal expectations. Children's and adolescents' moral evaluations of a nonconformist and their judgments regarding the acceptability of exclusion of this individual reveal their joint concern for group identity and morality.

Conclusion

Issues of inclusion and exclusion are central to social life. Adolescents frequently experience complex social situations involving peer pressure and group membership that reflect conflicting messages, goals, and norms. In cases in which members of their own group espouse norms that go against moral values like fairness, justice, and rights, the decision of what to do, whether exclusion is justified, and whether this type of deviance changes one's favor-

ability toward one's peer or the group is difficult.[41] Understanding the emotion attributions as well as the social evaluations of these types of encounters provide new insights regarding the integration of emotional evaluations and moral judgments in the context of social exclusion. Ultimately a central challenge for development is to determine when morality takes priority over group loyalty and what to do in cases in which a conflict exists. Studying these social cognitive judgments and processes in adolescence will help to create programs to ameliorate prejudicial attitudes that if left unchecked in adolescence, create tensions and problems in the adult world of the workforce. Creating a just and fair society requires attending to the social developmental origins of fairness and facilitating positive social development.

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