

THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF SITUATIONAL AND  
MOTIVATIONAL CUES AND MORAL REASONING ON PROSOCIAL  
BEHAVIOR IN KINDERGARTEN AND FIFTH GRADE CHILDREN

by

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Family and Child Development

(ABSTRACT)

This study examines the effects of controllability by the victim over his plight, the suggestion of future reciprocity, moral reasoning and social comprehension on the donating behavior of children of differential age groups. Forty-six children of kindergarten age and 32 fifth grade children were divided into four control groups (controllability, controllability/reciprocity, uncontrollability, or uncontrollability/ reciprocity), read the condition-appropriate vignette, and then given the opportunity to donate 0-5 items. Additionally, each subject was administered the Prosocial Moral Judgment Inventory (Eisenberg-Berg & Hand, 1979) and the Social Comprehension subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children- Revised (Wechsler, 1974). Nonsignificant results were found for the controllability and

reciprocity variables. A T-test revealed near significance,  $t(75) = 1.87$ ,  $p < .0657$ , when effects of age on moral reasoning are assessed. However, a correlational analysis revealed a nonsignificant correlation between moral reasoning and donating. Significant results were obtained,  $r = .34$ , between social comprehension and donating. The practical implications of these findings suggest that children's socialization plays an important role in prosocial behavior. Moreover, socialization through experiential versus purely cognitive approaches may be most beneficial.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Review of the Literature.....	5
Contollability.....	6
Reciprocity.....	11
Moral Reasoning.....	13
Social Comprehension.....	18
Hypotheses.....	22
Methods.....	24
Subjects.....	24
Procedures and Measures.....	25
Results.....	32
Discussion and Conclusions.....	38
References.....	45
Appendix.....	55
Parent Letter.....	56
Moral Judgement Inventory.....	58
Social Comprehension Subtest .....	61
Score Card.....	63

Vita..... 66

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	
Levels of Prosocial Reasoning.....	16
Table 2	
Model of Hypotheses.....	34
Table 3	
Donating Scores by Age within Treatment Groups..	35
Table 4	
Means for Continuous Variables by Grade.....	37

## INTRODUCTION

Cognitive-developmental theory emphasizes children's cognitive processes as a mediating factor in the development of prosocial behavior. Traditionally these processes have included intelligence, role and perspective taking abilities, and moral reasoning (consideration of general principles). Although this knowledge is assumed to be a necessary condition, it may not be a sufficient one in producing prosocial actions. Thus the search for a necessary level of cognition has given way to more sophisticated orientations such as the examination of causal processes including motivational (affect) and situational (context) factors (cues). Many variables including other motivational variables i.e. empathy and guilt (Hoffman, 1975), situational variables, i.e. cost (Eisenberg & Shell, 1986), nurturance by adults (Staub, 1971; Weissbrod, 1976), and permission to engage in activity (Staub, 1971b; Bryan & Walbeck, 1970; Grusec & Skubiski, 1970) have been identified as correlates. Additionally, personality characteristics, i.e. affective mood states (Underwood, Moore & Rosenhan, 1973), social factors, i.e. cultural

influences (Garbarino & Bronfenbrenner, 1976), family influence, i.e. parenting style, (Baumrind's, 1971 Authoritative-Reciprocal-high in warmth and responsiveness being the strongest correlate), and peer interactions (Staub & Sherk, 1970) have been identified as correlates to prosocial actions. Thus cognition as well as affect plays important and intertwining roles in the development of prosocial actions.

Affect influences primarily the content and mechanics of the event of processing, including how cognitive inputs are interpreted and whether an individual invokes and uses various skills and social cognitions, (Eisenberg, 1982). Affect also plays a role in determining if one responds to another's needs in a particular situation (Eisenberg, 1982). Prosocial behavior is in reality the product of the conjoint influence of several factors. Integrative theory development is needed.

A cognitive-developmental model such as Piagetian theory does assume that changes occur across developmental levels due to changes in cognitive structures with stage progression. An Information Processing Model would see differences due to changes in functional capacity, i.e.

amount of knowledge acquired. Nevertheless, both theories suggest that qualitative shifts occur. In the domain of prosocial actions, empirical evidence supports such a developmental trend (Stilt & Conner, 1962; Grusec & Redler, 1980; Ladd, Lange & Stremmel, 1983; Collins & Getz, 1976). Thus prosocial behavior, while influenced by a variety of factors, is viewed as a developmental process. However at each level of prosocial development, these various factors may have differential influences, and thus differential process paths may exist for each level. This study addressed the influences of a limited number of factors on prosocial behavior: perceived controllability of the victim over his (her) subsequent plight, social comprehension, suggestion of reciprocity, and moral reasoning at kindergarten and fifth grade levels. Thus the intent was to measure these factors' relative strengths at each of these development levels in order to ascertain which factors were more salient for a given developmental period. This study aimed also to provide partial information concerning how the processes may differ across these developmental levels. In order to obtain an objective measurement across these developmental levels, prosocial behavior was operationally defined in

this study as donating. The children donated within a range of 0 to 5 items.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Theoretical Considerations

Changes in children's prosocial behaviors are undoubtedly linked to changes in cognitive skills. An understanding of means-ends relationships is a prerequisite ability to prosocial action. Egocentrism would also seem to play an important constraining role in that role-taking abilities are intrinsic in altruistic interaction. As children's contacts with peers increase, they begin the process of realizing that other's have points of view different from their own. Children's understanding of intentionality and their ability to process complex social messages also increases in middle childhood and almost certainly underlies the changes in prosocial interactions (Hartup, 1983). Finally, social and self knowledge and the ability to coordinate these with maximum benefits becomes more extensive with experience. These cognitive and social skills necessary for moral reasoning develop in contexts of varied emotional and situational conditions and therefore the interactive influences of reasoning on behavior as well as behavior on reasoning is needed to provide a more informative picture (Blasi,

1980). In this way, the sources of age differences in prosocial behavior can become a more conjoint effort in formulating a clearly articulated theory.

Controllability. Fritz Heider (1958), the founder of attribution theory summarized this theory as follows:

"Man is usually not content with simply to register the observations around him; he needs to refer them as far as possible to the invariances of his environment...The underlying causes of events, especially the motives of other people, are the invariances of the environment that are relative to him; they give meaning to what he experiences and it is these meanings that are recorded in his life space, and are precipitated as the reality of the environment to which he then reacts."

Thus this theory is a theory of motivation based upon attributions of causality. Three central causal dimensions have been identified: stability, locus, and control; these dimensions, respectively are linked with expectancy change, esteem-related emotions, and interpersonal judgements (Weiner, 1979). It is the later dimension that is of relevance to this study. Perceived controllability is one of the essential determinants of how others are evaluated. Moreover, it has been well documented that perceived controllability influences helping behavior and whether others are

liked. If the victim is perceived to have or have had control over his plight; then the attribution made is labelled an internal attribution. However, if the environment is perceived to have a casual effect on the plight of the victim, i.e., he/she had no control, then the attribution made is an external attribution.

Weiner has asserted that the attributional analysis of achievement behavior intimates that the growth of achievement is contingent upon the learning of cognitive structures that represent the causal importance of effort (Weiner, 1972). There is evidence, as well, that casual ascriptions mediating moral concerns are similar to those associated with achievement behavior and thus may be developmental in nature. Hoffman (1975) proposed that empathy-based moral motives develop during childhood:

[During development] "the partial transformation of the empathic [component of response that pertains to the unpleasant affect transferred to the self] into sympathetic distress [a wish to terminate the other's distress] presumably occurs when the other person is truly a victim with no control over his or her fate. Other causal attributions are possible depending largely on situational cues. If the cues indicate the victim is responsible for his or her own plight, one's reactions may be incompatible with empathic or sympathetic distress...and the observer may feel indifferent or even derogate the victim." (Hoffman, 1984)

Also relevant to this discussion is Jean Piaget's proposal of a two stage cognitive-developmental theory of morality in which the consideration of intentions (of the other) is a characteristic of the higher, more integrated stage (Piaget, 1932). Although intent and control are not interchangeable concepts they are closely related, i.e. did one intend to "help" himself or was this even possible? It has been found (though not conclusively) that children use predominately outcome information to determine their judgements, while adults weight information more heavily about the intent in making moral evaluations (Weiner, 1985). Therefore it seems reasonable to anticipate that children will differ in some important respects from adults in the moral domain and that one of these respects will be the victim's intent or the control the victim is perceived to have had over his needy state.

Studies of helping have clearly shown that the decision to help someone depends, in part, upon the perceived cause of another's needy state. Berkowitz (1969) reported that help for a fellow subject was more likely when the need was the result of an error on the part of the experimenter, rather than the subject's own fault. Piliavin, Rodin, and Piliavin (1969) staged an

"accident" in a New York subway whereby a man collapsed on the floor. In one experimental condition the person had clearly been drinking, while in the other, the person carried a cane. The results clearly indicated that more help was given in the second experimental condition, apparently because of the disparities in perceived responsibility (control) for the falling in the two situations. Drunkenness is perceived as subject to volitional control, whereas illness is not. Help is withheld when a failure is perceived as controllable; the persons should presumably help themselves. These experiments concluded that help is more likely when the perceived cause of need is an environmental barrier or illness as opposed to being internal to the person needing aid.

Help is least likely when the needy individual is perceived as accountable for his or her own plight. In a experiment confirming this hypothesis, Barnes, Ickes, and Kidd (1977) examined altruism in the classroom - lending classnotes to an unknown classmate. Two themes were given for the classmate's failure to take these notes. Either he was unable to take good notes (uncontrollable) or he was did not try (controllable). The data revealed that requests for notes due to lack of

trying (internal) were least likely to be answered. Building on this research, Simon and Weiner (1979) conducted a similar but more complex note-lending experiment manipulating the dimensions of stability, locus of control, and levels of controls. Helping behavior was reported to be high in all conditions except when the cause was internal and controllable, in which case, aid was unlikely to be given. If a student did not try to take good notes or could have avoided being absent, then help was withheld.

A developmental attribution study was conducted by Weiner and Peter (1973) describing age differences in making achievement judgements. Children age 4 to 18 years old were asked to pretend that they were teachers and must provide "evaluative feedback" to their students. The exam outcome and the ability level of the students were described differentially. The results indicated that the use of effort information changes with age. Reward for positive behavior increases with age, while punishment for a lack of effort increases until the age of 12 and then decreases. Thus, effort ascriptions (controllability) appear to be most important among children 10 to 12 year old.

Attributions of positive and negative events to

controllable factors such as effort expenditure and a desire to help or harm, maximize reward and punishment toward others (Weiner, 1985). Moreover, attributions of control greatly influence the likelihood of one helping another in need, as well as the likiability of the other.

**Reciprocity** Reciprocity is a key feature of human social relationships and has been studied in relation to altruism. Alexander (1987) has argued that moral systems are in fact systems of indirect reciprocity. He suggests that the prosocial individual may gain by: (1) engaging in profitable interactions with others who notice his or her behavior, (2) receiving direct rewards as a result of his or her behavior, and (3) strengthening the group itself in such a manner as to benefit his or her long-term interests in the group's success.

Schwartz and Gottlieb (1976, 1980) found that individuals who were slow to respond or failed to respond when they were anonymous were particularly likely to respond when they knew that their actions could be observed by others. This type of response is consistent with the notion that helping is often

motivated by the possibility of future rewards and is therefore a form of reciprocity. Trivers (1971) noted that a variety of long-term benefits may accrue to individuals who accept negative imbalances in resource flow, thus altruistic behavior can at times be characterized as anticipated future reciprocity.

In the developmental literature, Youniss (1986) found that the great majority of children aged 6-7 years consider acts of symmetrical reciprocity with other children as indicators that they are friends. He also noted that as children get older, they are better able to understand and accept that others do not have to reciprocate immediately or in identical terms. This data also fits the predictions of Triver's model of reciprocal altruism, which purports that children at approximately ages 9 to 10 have this ability to understand cases of omitted or delayed reciprocity.

Further support has been found by Peterson, Hartmann and Gelfand (1977) in their study comparing kindergarten and third grade children's responses according to the principles of social responsibility and reciprocity. Generous children (those who had shared in a marble-dropping game) experienced either an unseen helpful or unhelpful peer in a joint task. Within the

game context, generosity continued following the helpful condition and decreased following the unhelpful condition. However, the third grade children were much less retaliatory than were the kindergarten children after exposure to the unhelpful peer. Reciprocity is expected; however, older children appear to be better able to understand unequal or omitted acts of reciprocity.

The ability to understand and accept asymmetrical reciprocity does not mean that reciprocity is any less significant a motivator in influencing older children's prosocial behaviors. Peterson (1980) provided children in kindergarten and grades 3 and 6 with an opportunity to help others who needed help or to donate to others who could in turn help them. There was a clear tendency for children to donate more in the reciprocating condition. Moreover, this tendency increased with age.

The literature supports the escalating importance of reciprocity in children's prosocial behaviors with age. It also documents the ability of children, at approximately age 9, to understand and accept that others do not reciprocate in identical or immediate terms.

**Moral Reasoning.** Historically within the cognitive-

developmental paradigm, the development of moral reasoning has been examined as a primary causal link to the exhibition of moral behavior. However, repeated studies have not wholly supported this premise, and a search for other contributing factors has recently been realized. There is evidence that moral reasoning plays some role in prosocial behavior as indicated by the findings of moderate correlations between the two in numerous studies. Emler and Rushton (1974), and Olejnik (1975), have reported higher altruism scores among children with more advanced levels of moral judgement, as measured by Piagetian strategies. Similar results have been reported using Kohlberg's procedures (Harris, Mussen, & Rutherford, 1976; Rubin & Schneider, 1973). Rubin and Schneider (1973), found a measure of moral judgement to be significantly related to generosity and helpfulness. Thus moral reasoning is one type of cognitive process viewed as affecting prosocial behavior.

Piaget (1932) and later Kohlberg (1969) building on Piaget's work, have delineated stages of moral reasoning associated with prohibition related issues (i.e., moral issues involving rules, punishment, authorities, and formal obligations) which parallel Piaget's stages of

cognitive development. These stages of moral reasoning within these models are viewed as universal, invariant in sequence, and hierarchical in structure, with each stage involving more advanced cognitive structures than the previous stage. These stages generally progress from self-oriented reasoning to consideration of broader principals of humanness. More recently, specific prosocial moral reasoning categories, which represent components or parts of developmental stages of prosocial moral judgements (i.e., moral dilemmas in which the desires or needs of the story protagonist are in conflict with the needs of another in a context in which explicit rules, authorities, laws and punishment are either irrelevant or deemphazied) have been delineated as represented in Table 1 (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979). Like the other moral reasoning models, Eisenberg viewed these levels as being hierarchical in nature and entailing a progressively broader use of principles. However, due to lack of data, claims regarding universality of invariance of sequence have not been made.

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Table 1

Levels of Prosocial Reasoning

Level	Orientation	Description	Group
1	Hedonsitic, self-focused	The individual is concerned with self-oriented consequences rather than moral considerations. Reasons for assisting or not assisting another include consideration of direct gain to self, future reciprocity, and concern for others who the individual needs and/or likes (due to the affectional tie).	Preschoolers and younger elementary school children
2	Needs of others	The individual expresses concern for the physical, material, and psychological needs of others even though the other's needs conflict with one's own needs. This concern is expressed in the simplest terms, without clear evidence of self-reflective role taking, verbal expressions of sympathy or reference to internalized affect such as guilt.	Preschoolers and elementary school children
3	Approval and interpersonal and/or stereotyped	Stereotyped images of good and bad persons and behaviors and/or considerations of others' approval and acceptance are used in justifying prosocial or nonhelping behaviors.	Elementary and high school students
4	a. Empathic	The individual's judgements include evidence of sympathetic responding, self-reflective role taking, concern with the other's humanness, and/or guilt or positive affect related to the consequences of one's actions.	Older elementary school and high school students

(table continues)

Level	Orientation	Description	Group
	b. Transitional (empathic and internalized)	Justifications for helping or not helping involve internalized values, norms, duties, or responsibilities, or refer to the necessity of protecting the rights and dignity of other persons; these ideas, however, are not clearly stated.	Minority of people high school age
5	Strongly internalized	Justifications for helping or not helping are based on internalized values, norms, or responsibilities, the desire to maintain individual and societal contractual obligations, and the belief in the dignity, rights, and equality of all individuals. Positive or negative affect related to the maintenance of self-respect for living up to one's own values and accepted norms also characterizes this stage.	Only a small minority of high school students and virtually no elemen- tary school children

N. Eisenberg, R. Lennon, and K. Roth (1983)

Subsequent research within Eisenberg's model has supported correlations between age and type of reasoning utilized. Eisenberg-Berg and Hand (1979) in an observational study of 35 preschoolers, aged 48-63 months, determined that these preschoolers used primarily hedonistic and needs-oriented reasoning. In a later study, Eisenberg, Shell, Pasternack, Lennon, Beller and Matly (1987) examined the age changes in prosocial moral reasoning over a period of seven years for three groups of participants (Total  $N=85$ ). Hedonistic reasoning decreased with age; simple needs-oriented moral judgements increased with age and then leveled off; most other more sophisticated types of reasoning increased in a linear fashion with age. This evidence suggests young children are more likely to consider self or simple needs whereas older children are more likely to ascribe to broader principles which are progressively oriented towards others' humanness, dignity, rights and equality (Eisenberg, 1979). One question that remains is whether moral judgement in the more mature, internalized stages has a greater impact on prosocial behavior than does moral judgements in the less mature stages.

Social Comprehension In examining the process of

socialization and its effects on the development of prosocial behavior in children, one must consider a blended theoretical framework. Cognitive-developmental and social learning perspectives offer a model for examining prosocial behavior as an interactive and synergistic effect of environment and cognitive structure. That is to say that while developmental-structural advances in older children's reasoning abilities enable higher level moral reasoning, socialization provides the individual with the information to use in the reasoning process. Thus within this essentially cognitivist framework, socialization and the emotions act principally as modifier variables (MacDonald, 1988).

Such an integration of theories has been proposed by other scholars. Gibbs and Schnell (1985) proposed an integration of the cognitive-developmental tradition, beginning with Piaget and coming to fruition with Kohlberg, and Durkheim's (1961) societalist view that morality is essentially a matter of the impression of moral values upon the individual by society, by emphasizing both the importance of socialization as well as the cognitive contributions of the child. Hoffman's (1983) theory is also an integrative hybrid, taking

into account parental socialization techniques and the internalization of societal norms as compatible with a developmental account of the child's contributions to the socialization process that features the child's developing cognitive competencies (MacDonald, 1988). Burton (1976) also espouses an integrative view having suggested that parents contribute in specific ways to the development of their children's cognitive structures. He suggests that parents teach social information in ways that will help the children to perceive and discriminate many different moral situations as belonging to the same class of events. Burton believes this helps children to comprehend contradictions in norms and values.

Children who have been socialized by parents who are prosocial do tend to exhibit more prosocial behaviors themselves. Rosenhan (1970), studying civil rights activists, found that those who were the most committed tended to have had parents who were themselves fully committed activists. These parents had given their children considerable opportunities for observing and participating in prosocial causes. Those who were less committed tended to have had parents who had preached but not practised altruism. Hoffman (1975)

found similar results in a study of middle fifth grade children and their parents. Parents' hierarchy of values, disciplinary techniques, and affection for the child were measured, and the most influential parent attribute in relation to peer assessments of the children's altruism was found to be parental espousal of altruistic values. Hoffman (1976) further recommended that parents not shield their children from distress experiences, so that children can be exposed to the range of natural events that sensitize them to the feelings of others. Staub (1979) found that having parents engineer situations in which the child will be receptive to helping or sharing increases the likelihood that the child will engage in another prosocial act. Staub and Fotta (1978) and Staub, Leavy, and Shortsleeves (1975) found that having children make puzzles for sick children or teach younger children first aid techniques increased the likelihood of later prosocial acts by girls, but not boys.

While many researchers have examined the effects of socialization by family, peers, and society on the development of prosocial behavior, few have specifically measured social comprehension in relation to prosocial behavior. To do so would seem to be a logical and

refining extension of the body of literature. Robb, Bernardoni and Johnson (1972) have suggested that the Social Comprehension subtest section of the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (Wechsler, 1974), specifically the responses to questions 6 and 9 which ask the examinee what should be done if a younger child starts a fight with them and why criminals are locked up, may reveal cooperative solution abilities or manipulative tendencies, hostility or aggression. Further studies measuring the influence of social comprehension on prosocial behavior are needed.

### Hypotheses

1. Literature indicates children are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior if the recipient of their actions is perceived as having had no control over their plight than if he/she is perceived as having had control. Moreover, the ability to discriminate and act on this controllability cue increases with age. Therefore, it was predicted that 5th grade children would engage in more donating behavior than would kindergarten children due to their ability to discriminate and act on the controllability cue.
2. Children are more likely to engage in prosocial

behavior if they believe that their actions will be reciprocated. It was predicted that 5th grade children would donate more than kindergarten children based on the suggestion of a future act of returned reciprocity.

3. There is an increasing tendency to consider general principles with age, and therefore moral reasoning is predicted to be increasingly more influential on prosocial behavior. It was predicted that fifth grade children would have higher levels of moral reasoning than would kindergarten children. Fifth grade children were also predicted to donate more than kindergarten children due to higher levels of moral reasoning.

4. Social comprehension was predicted to influence prosocial behavior. Children with higher levels of social comprehension were predicted to donate more in each condition than their peers who exhibit lower levels of social comprehension.

## METHODS

### Subjects

Two groups of subjects, kindergarteners and 5th graders were identified within an elementary school located in a small city in Virginia. The Superintendent of the school system was contacted, and the school system chose the school that participated in this study. All four kindergarten classrooms and two classrooms of 5th grade children were asked to participate. Permission was obtained from the parents of the children who participated in this study. Parents of 46 kindergarten children and 32 fifth grade children responded. The kindergarten children were 5 to 6 years of age, and the fifth grade children were aged 10 to 11 years. On the day of testing two 5th grade students were absent, leaving a pool of 30 fifth graders.

Each age group was randomly assigned to four groups of 7 to 13 members each (Total  $N=76$ ) so that four different conditions could be applied and the most salient condition(s) could be identified for each age group. Groups are referred to as follows: Kindergarten - Groups 1 ( $n=12$ ), 2 ( $n=11$ ), 3 ( $n=13$ ), and 4 ( $n=10$ ); and 5th graders - Groups 5 ( $n=8$ ), 6 ( $n=7$ ), 7 ( $n=8$ ), and 8 ( $n=7$ ).

**Procedures and Measures:**

A pilot study was first conducted with five 5 year old university lab school children. In the course of this project, it appeared that social intelligence played a role in higher donating behavior. Therefore, the study was expanded to include a measurement of social comprehension for each subject.

Prior to the data collection process, 12 college, senior-level student teachers, who volunteered to assist in the study, were trained in the procedures and measures utilized in this study,

On the morning of the study, a pair of researchers, taking 12 kindergarten students at a time, distributed nickels, balloons and/or stickers to each child. The children were allowed to choose five items of their choice. Once the selection process was completed, the researchers labelled a plastic container with each child's name and put the items in the container. It was explained to the children that the items now belonged to them, and that they would keep the boxes with them until their return to the classrooms. It was further explained that upon their return, their teachers would assist them with the safe keeping of their boxes until they could

take them home at the end of the school day. The same distribution procedures were conducted for the fifth grade students during the afternoon portion of the day.

Each child was then individually assigned an examiner, who read one of the four vignettes, the controllability, controllability/reciprocity, uncontrollability, or uncontrollability/reciprocity vignette, according to the child's random group assignment. Breakdowns of groups were: groups 1 and 5 - controllability vignette with reciprocity suggestion; groups 2 and 6 - controllability without suggestion; groups 3 and 7 - uncontrollability vignette with reciprocity suggestion; and groups 4 and 8 - uncontrollability vignette without suggestion.

Uncontrollability was defined as the victim being unable to control the circumstances leading to his or her plight. The uncontrollability vignette is a follows:

Chris is a boy (girl) who hurt himself (herself) while playing on the swings. He (she) accidentally fell out and hurt himself (herself). He(she) didn't mean to. It just happened. It was an accident and he(she) had to go to the hospital.

The uncontrollability vignette with suggestion of

reciprocity is as follows:

Chris is a boy(girl) who hurt himself (herself) while playing on the swings. He (she) accidentally fell out and hurt himself (herself). He(she) didn't mean to. It just happened. It was an accident and he(she) had to go to the hospital. Sometimes when you give, others feel like giving something back to you. If you give something to a friend, he or she might give something back to you. Or if you give to someone you don't know, he or she might also give something back to you. So sometimes when you give you get something back.

Controllability is where the story victim had some control in preventing the incident but failed to utilize such control. The controllability vignette is as follows:

Chris is a boy (girl) who hurt himself (herself) playing on the swings. Chris wanted to jump out of the swing, and he(she) knew it was dangerous. However he(she) did it anyway even though he(she) knew he(she) could get hurt. Chris did it on purpose. He(she) was hurt and had to go to the hospital.

The controllability vignette with suggestion of reciprocity is as follows:

Chris is a boy (girl) who hurt himself (herself) playing on the swings. Chris wanted to jump out of the swing, and he(she) knew it was dangerous. However he(she) did it anyway even though he(she) knew he(she) could get hurt. Chris did it on purpose.

He(she) was hurt and had to go to the hospital. Sometimes when you give, others feel like giving something back to you. If you give something to a friend, he or she might give something back to you. Or if you give to someone you don't know, he or she might also give something back to you. So sometimes when you give you get something back.

Following the reading of one of the vignettes indicated by group assignment, the researcher then gave each child an opportunity to share none to one or more of their stickers, balloons or nickels with the child depicted in the vignette. Precise wording was utilized: "Do you want to give anything to Chris? You may give everything, something, or nothing - whatever you want to do. Tell me when you are done." An identical plastic box labelled "Chris" was available for the subjects if they chose to deposit any donations. Each child's response was elicited in determining the reasoning used for donating or not donating: "Tell me why you gave (0-5) stickers."

Each child was then administered the Prosocial Moral Judgement Instrument (Eisenberg-Berg and Hand, 1979) and the Social Comprehension subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Revised (Wechsler, 1974). Each subject's responses were

documented so that the responses could be coded by another researcher and interrater reliability established.

The Prosocial Moral Judgement Instrument (Eisenberg-Berg et al, 1979) consists of four moral dilemmas accompanied by illustrations. The dilemmas describe situations whereby the needs of the story protagonist conflict with those of others, in a situation in which the role of authorities, punishments, laws, rules and formal obligations are minimal. Standardized probes are used and the sex of the story protagonist is matched to the sex of the child.

The moral-judgement stories differ in several dimensions. In two of the stories, children are the central characters and they become involved in situations that could happen to children. Those situations entail a story about a child who views another child being beaten up by a bully and has to decide whether or not to assist, and a story about a child who is asked to assist another child whose leg is injured when doing so would result in the child missing a party. The other two stories utilize adults as the central characters. These stories entail a story about farmers asked to share their limited food supplies

following a flood and a story about a person who is asked to give up an opportunity to win money and participate in an important swimming contest in order to help crippled children. One of the stories is as follows:

"One day a girl (boy) named Mary (Eric) was going to a friend's birthday party. On her way she saw a girl (boy) who had fallen down and hurt her leg. The girl asked Mary to go to her house and get her parents so the parents could come and take her to a doctor. But if Mary did run and get the child's parents, she would be late to the birthday party and miss the ice cream, cake and all the games.

What should Mary do? Why?" (Eisenberg-Berg and Hand, 1979).

The children's moral judgement was coded by the examiner into one of the following categories: Authority/Judgement, Hedonistic, Needs Oriented, Pragmatic, Sterotypic, and Approval Oriented. Scores were then tallied in each category for the four vignettes. The children's reasons were also documented and were checked by the research director for appropriate coding. A total moral reasoning score was then obtained by multiplying the raw score in each category by an assigned number, 1 to 6, according to the heirarchical structure (Authority/ Judgement=1, Hedonistic=2...Approval Oriented =6). Thus a score

between 4 and 24 was obtained for each subject.

## RESULTS

To verify the randomness of the assignment to conditions, analyses were conducted on the background variables and experimental conditions. Six Chi Square tests reflecting the six combinations of pairs of the four dichotomous variables (age, gender, controllability and reciprocity) were conducted. None were significant.

Analyses were conducted to test for each of the hypotheses (see Table 2 for a model of the hypotheses). The first hypothesis, that subjects would be more likely to donate if the story character had no control over their plight than if he/she did, and that the influence of controllability on donating behavior would increase with age was not supported. A two-way ANOVA was conducted with age and controllability as the independent variables and donating as the dependent variable. This analysis showed no significant interaction and no main effect for controllability. There was, however, a main effect for age with older children tending to donate more. Table 3 shows that the mean scores on donating are similar regardless of the presence or absence of the controllability variable.

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Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

---

The second hypothesis, that children would be more likely to donate when a suggestion of reciprocity was made, and that the influence of reciprocity on donating behavior would increase with age was also not supported. Again a two-way ANOVA was conducted, with donating as the dependent variable and age and reciprocity as the independent variables. There was no significant interaction and no main effect for reciprocity on donating. Table 3 shows that mean scores for donating do not vary according to either the presence or absence of the reciprocity variable.

In order to test the third hypothesis, that moral reasoning increases with age and that its influence increases with age, two analyses were conducted. First, a T-test revealed that 5th grade children had higher moral reasoning than kindergarten children at the level of a trend,  $t(75) = 1.87$ ,  $p < .0657$ . Second, correlational analysis revealed a nonsignificant correlation between moral reasoning and donating, at the kindergarten level ( $r = .16$ ), as well as at the fifth

Table 2

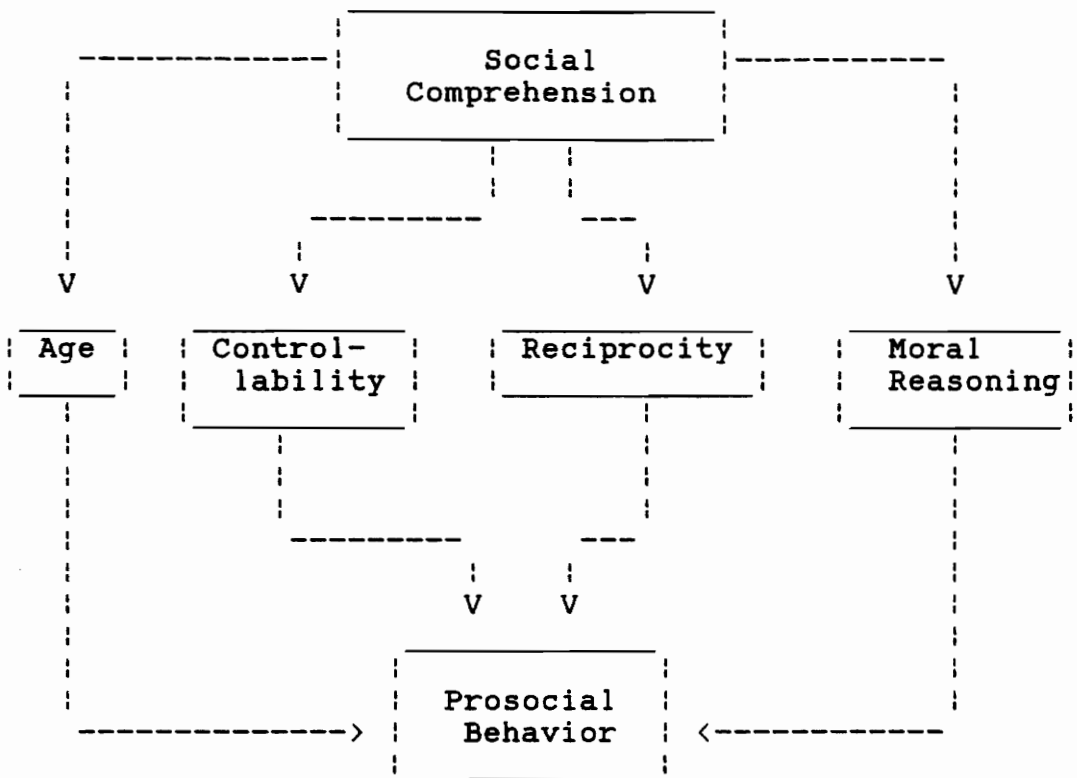
Model of Hypotheses

Table 3

Donating Scores by Age within Treatment Groups

<u>Vignette Condition</u>	<u>Grade</u>			
	<u>Kindergarten</u>		<u>5TH</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	<u>Controllability</u>			
Present	1.2	1.3	2.3	1.58
Absent	1.3	1.06	2.1	1.16
	<u>Reciprocity</u>			
Present	1.2	.87	2.0	.96
Absent	1.3	1.40	2.3	1.16

Note: There were no significant main effects for reciprocity or controllability and no interaction effects of age with reciprocity or controllability. There was, however, a significant main effect for age on donating.

grade level ( $r=.09$ ). Thus 5th grade children appear to have higher moral reasoning skills than do kindergarten children, but these skills appear unrelated to donating behaviors.

A correlational analysis was also utilized to test the final hypothesis, that social comprehension influences prosocial behavior such that higher social comprehension would be associated with greater donating. This hypothesis was confirmed. Social comprehension was significantly related to donating,  $r= .34$ . Social comprehension was also significantly related to age  $t(75)= 3.05$ ,  $p, .005$ . See Table 4.

---

Insert Table 4 about here

---

A series of two-way ANOVAS were conducted with moral reasoning, social comprehension raw scores and social comprehension scaled scores as dependent variables. None of the two-way interactions were significant. Besides the effect of age on social comprehension raw scores, there were no other significant main effects.

Table 4  
Means for Continuous Variables by Grade

Variables	Kindergarten		5th		t(75)	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Donating	1.24	1.18	2.17	1.37	3.05	.0035
<sup>a</sup> SC Raw Score	10.78	4.04	23.17	5.22	11.02	.0000
<sup>a</sup> SC Scaled Score	12.91	3.28	13.27	3.70	.43	.6708
Moral Reasoning	13.30	3.07	14.45	2.26	1.87	.0057

<sup>a</sup> SC = Social Comprehension from the Comprehension subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Revised (WISC-R).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis that fifth grade children will donate more in the uncontrollability condition than in the controllability condition, and that the ability to discriminate this cue and to act on it increases with age was not supported by the data. It appears that, although the literature indicates that children 5 years of age are able to distinguish the intentions of another and to assign blame based on purposeful or controllable negative consequences of the action, this cue was not a salient one in this study. Studies of intentionality and how children use this information in making moral judgements has been a long and difficult struggle. Flavell (1985) and Shultz (1980) suggested that one of the lessons to be learned is that if one wants to learn about children's developing knowledge about intentionality, then it ought to be studied directly, rather than trying to infer it from children's moral judgements.

A final point on the subject of controllability/intentionality is that it can be a very complex process. A person may be carrying out more than one intentional act at a time and that many action sequences

may reflect the existence of a hierarchical structure of subgoals and superordinate goals (Flavell, 1985). For example, in the vignettes used in this study, the subjects may have inferred that although "Chris did it [jumped from the swing] on purpose... and knew he/she could get hurt" that the main goal was to swing or play and have fun, not to get injured. So one interpretation of the vignette may be that he meant to have fun, albeit in a dangerous fashion, but that he/she did not mean to get hurt and is therefore judged as blameless. This is perhaps a methodological flaw that could be corrected in future studies. Other suggestions for modifications of the vignettes include having separate vignettes for each cue and including a conclusion e.g. what happened to Chris?

Another factor worth further consideration is the validity of the donating strategy. Using natural or logical consequence items i.e. bandaides versus balloons, stickers or nickels may link the donating process to the hospital stay. Thus the test situation may be more comprehensible to the child and could possibly yield higher donating. It may also prove to be an insignificant difference since in this culture people in the hospital receive items such as candy and flowers.

The custom appears to be not one of direct help but rather one of helping the person to "feel good". Young children may understand the intentions underlying this social custom; however, this question needs further study.

The hypothesis that children are more likely to donate if they believe their actions will be reciprocated at some future time, and that this trend increases with age was also not supported by the data. The mere suggestion of reciprocity appears to have been too weak a motivator in affecting the subject's prosocial behavior. Although reciprocity is an important ingredient in relationships of helping and sharing, the subjects had no relationship with the child presented in the vignette. Reciprocity usually occurs within the context of friendship, and reciprocity outside of friendship entails risk (Youniss, 1986). Donating or other modes of prosocial behavior would probably be more evident in research measuring the effects of reciprocity utilizing children's real friends as the needy individuals as opposed to an unknown confederate.

Despite a history of moderate correlations between moral reasoning and prosocial behavior, the data in this study did not support such a trend. The data did

support evidence of a higher level of moral reasoning among the fifth grade children. However, the children did not employ these abilities in their donating judgements. The question that remains then is, why not? Speculation on an answer to this question involves the issue of relative cost to the subject. One possibility that exists is that there is a conflict between moral reasoning and self-interested behavior, and individuals ignore their own moral reasoning. In Gilligan's 1982 study, one of her subjects had a conflict among Catholic ideology regarding abortion, financial concerns, and her husband's affection. She decided to have the abortion, admitting that her actions are of self-interest and are morally wrong. However, it appears that in this study, children do not have this conflict. They may have satisfied their own self-interests by saving some stickers, balloons and/or nickels while also helping the victim. Indeed, the subjects of kindergarten age donated approximately one item and kept four, and fifth grade subjects donated approximately two items and kept three for themselves. Thus the situation is structured so that moral reasoning does not really need to come into play. If it does, it is more to determine how much to help, not whether to choose

between self or other's interests.

In this study, both the cost of helping and the significance of the help to the victim is low. Eisenburg and Shell (1986) examined the cost of prosocial behavior as a mediator between prosocial behavior and moral reasoning. As predicted low-cost prosocial actions were unrelated to moral reasoning, whereas high-cost actions, which were expected to create a moral conflict, were significantly associated with developmentally mature reasoning. Consequently the present research supports Eisenberg and Shell's findings as there appears to be no relationship between moral reasoning and donating because the cost of assisting is relatively low and the benefit to the recipient is also of relatively little significance, thus evoking no morally relevant concerns.

The data does support the idea that there is a relationship between social comprehension and donating behavior. It appears that the request by the examiner "Do you want to give anything to Chris?" is sufficient to activate social norms. Social norms are frequently prosocial in nature and may be activated without one having to stop and ponder an ethical or moral decision. Therefore, much of prosocial behavior results from socialization. In this study there is a correlation

between higher scores on social comprehension and higher numbers of items donated. Thus the better socialized the child, the more likely he/ she will be to exhibit prosocial behaviors. This finding has been supported in other studies. Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey and Brown (1986) found that children rated highly by peers and teachers in the areas of social competence were actually better at relating positively or prosocially in peer group entry situations and in instances of provocation by peers. These highly competent children were hypothesized to be better at processing social cues than their less competent peers. Additionally, the exhibition of competent social behavior resulted in peers' positive judgements and behavior toward the other, thus acting as another social cue for the child.

The practical implications of these findings make a strong case for socializing children through means other than moral education as suggested by Kohlberg for developing prosocial behavior. Whether in the context of family, peer, or societal systems, we need to learn more about how prosocial behavior is rooted in the child's personal life experiences (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler and Chapman, 1983). More often than not in research what we learn is about a child's response as either cooperative

or uncooperative or his status on a particular test of prosocial behavior. Socialization practices that teach a child comprehensively through "on the job" experience, emphasizing the feelings of needy others, how to render help, etc. need further study.

While there is little support in this study for the effect of chosen motivational variables on prosocial donating behavior, there is the possibility that with the elimination of certain methodological problem areas, some support might be found in future research endeavors. Moreover, since some support is documented in the body of literature, careful consideration may need to be given to motivational cues within specific situational contexts. By applying only gradual, subtle changes within the situational context, perhaps more sensitive measurements could be acquired thus rendering better information with regard to developmentally distinctive process paths.

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## **APPENDIX**

January 3, 1991

Dear Parent:

Most of us are concerned about the social development of our nation's children. We all want our children to grow up to be good citizens. We at Virginia Tech are also interested in this issue. We are studying how this process might work so that it may be helpful to all of us who raise, work with or are otherwise interested in promoting what is in the best interest of our children.

The university and the Roanoke County School system have approved this study. W.E. Cundiff has been chosen as the site where the study will be conducted. It is important that we have as full cooperation as possible in order that the results will truly represent a large number of children. Your child's participation is important.

You may be assured of complete confidentiality. There will be no names associated with any child's responses. Moreover, you or your child may decline or withdraw at any time without prejudice.

Each child will be individually interviewed for approximately 30 minutes during the school day. The interview will include some stories about citizenship and will ask for each child's response. A summary of the results will be made available to you in the near future. I would appreciate the opportunity to learn from your child. Please indicate by your signature below whether or not you wish for your child to participate. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at home, 344-0273, or at work, 981-0122. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Gina Bevins Wilburn  
Graduate Student  
Department of Child and Family Development  
Virginia Polytechnic and State University

-----  
I give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to  
participate in the project described above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

I would prefer that my child \_\_\_\_\_ not  
participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

I want to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Signature  
-----

**Moral Judgement Inventory Vignettes**

The Accident: One day a girl (boy) named Mary (Eric) was going to a friend's birthday party. On her way she saw a girl (boy) who had fallen down and hurt her leg. The girl asked Mary to go to her house and get her parents so the parents could come and take her to a doctor. But if Mary did run and get the child's parents, she would be late to the birthday party and miss the ice cream, cake and all the games. What should Mary do? Why?

The Flood: A poor farming village named Highlands grew just enough food to feed the village people with no extra food left over. Just at that time, a nearby town named Lowlands was flooded and all the town's food was ruined leaving them nothing to eat. People in the flooded town of Lowlands asked the poor farmers of Highlands to give them some food. If the farmers in Highlands did give the food to the people in Lowlands, the farmers would go hungry after working so hard at growing their food. They would not die but would be very hungry and in pain. Their tummies would hurt. What do you think the farmers of Highlands should do?

Should they give the food to the town or not?

John's (Ann's) Story: One day while John (Ann) was playing in his (her) yard, he (she) saw a bully push and tease another child whom he (she) did not know. There weren't any grownups around. As John (Ann) watched, the one boy (girl) kept pushing the other boy (girl) down every time he (she) tried to get back up. John (Ann) was having a good time playing in his (her) yard, and the bully might pick on him (her) too if he (she) tried to help.

What should John (Ann) do? Why?

Swimming Story: Sue (Bob) was a young woman (man) who was very good at swimming. She (he) was asked to help young crippled children, who could not walk, learn to swim so that they could make their legs strong for walking. Sue (Bob) was the only one in town who could do the job because she (he) was a good swimmer and a teacher. But helping the crippled children would take much of Sue's (Bob's) free time, and Sue (Bob) wanted to practice swimming very hard for an important swimming contest coming up. If Sue (Bob) could not practice swimming in all her (his) free time, she (he) would probably lose the swimming contest and not the receive

the prize for winning which was money.

What should Sue (Bob) do? Why?

**Social Comprehension Subtest Questions of the Weschler  
Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R)**

1. What is the thing to do when you cut your finger?
2. What are you supposed to do if you find someone's wallet or pocketbook in a store?
3. What should you do if you see a thief coming from the window of your neighbor's house?
4. What are some reasons why we need policemen?
5. What is the thing to do if you lose a ball that belongs to one of your friends?
6. What is the thing to do if a boy (girl) much smaller than yourself starts to fight with you?
7. In what way is a house built of brick or stone better than one built of wood?
8. Why is it important for cars to have license plates?
9. Why are criminals locked up?
10. Why do we have to put stamps on letters?
11. Why is it important for the government to hire people to inspect the meat in meat-packing plants?
12. Why is it usually better to give money to a well-known charity than to a street beggar?
13. Why is it good to hold elections by secret ballot?
14. In what ways are paperback books better than hard-

cover books?

15. Why should a promise be kept?

16. Why is cotton often used in making cloth?

17. What are the advantages of having Senators and  
Congressman?

Note: All answers are coded 0, 1, or 2 based on  
specific criteria for appropriate responses.

SCORE CARD

CHILD'S AGE: YRS \_\_\_\_\_, MNTHS \_\_\_\_\_

EXAMINER'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

I. DONATING PROCEDURE

VIGNETTE # \_\_\_\_\_ NUMBER OF ITEMS DONATED \_\_\_\_\_

REASON GIVEN FOR DONATION/NONDONATION \_\_\_\_\_

II. PROSOCIAL MORAL JUDGEMENT INVENTORY

<u>STORY</u>	<u>HELP</u>	<u>REASON GIVEN</u>
ACCIDENT	Y or N	_____ _____ _____
SWIMMER	Y or N	_____ _____ _____
BULLY	Y or N	_____ _____ _____
FLOOD	Y or N	_____ _____ _____

## MORAL JUDGEMENT INVENTORY

SCORING:	A/J	H	NO	PRAG	STERO	AO
ACCIDENT	___	___	___	___	___	___
SWIMMER	___	___	___	___	___	___
BULLY	___	___	___	___	___	___
FLOOD	___	___	___	___	___	___
TOTALS	___	___	___	___	___	___
SCORE	1x ___	+ 2x ___	+3x ___	+4x ___	+5x ___	+6x ___ = ___

\*Scale: 1=no use; 2=use in 1 story; 3=use in 2 stories; 4=use in 3 stories; 5=use in all 4 stories

## SOCIAL COMPREHENSION SUBTEST

#	RESPONSE	SCORE
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____

11. \_\_\_\_\_

12. \_\_\_\_\_

13. \_\_\_\_\_

14. \_\_\_\_\_

15. \_\_\_\_\_

16. \_\_\_\_\_

17. \_\_\_\_\_

Raw Score \_\_\_\_\_

Scaled Score \_\_\_\_\_

**VITA**

Vita

Name: Gina Bevins Wilburn

Date of Birth: July 4, 1959

Education:

Virginia Intermont College  
Bachelor of Arts, Psychology/Sociology, 1980

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Masters' Degree, 1991

Employment Experience:

Coordinator, Mental Health Services of the Roanoke Valley, 1984-1991. Supervises clinical and support staff, daily operations, fiscal management and all services provided for two programs for emotionally disturbed children.

Residential and Day Treatment Clinician, Mental Health Services of the Roanoke Valley, 1980-1984. Casemanagement, individual and group therapy, parent training, treatment and discharge planning with emotionally disturbed children, aged 5 to 12, and their families.