Adolescent Moral Judgment and Perceptions of Family Interaction

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Oakland Growth Study (Jones, 1939) subjects and 98 adolescent offspring, ages 10 to 18 years, responded to Kohlberg Moral Judgment Interviews (Colby et al., 1987) and reported their perceptions of family interaction during 2 waves of longitudinal follow-up at the Institute of Human Development, University of California, Berkeley. Relationships between adolescent moral judgment and parent and adolescent perceptions of family structure, decision making, value orientation, moral transmission, and interpersonal relationships were assessed, with age, sex, IQ, and parent moral judgment controlled. Adolescent moral judgment was most consistently related to reports of positive intrafamilial relationships and cognitive stimulation of moral reasoning. Sex differences in relationships between family interaction and moral judgment were also found.

The purpose of the research reported here was to examine relationships between adolescent moral judgment and adolescent and parent perceptions of family interaction. The present study is part of a growing body of empirical evidence that challenges the biases against parents and families in cognitive-developmental theory.

Kohlberg's (1969) cognitive-developmental account of moral development focused on the role of cognitive processes in the development of moral reasoning. According to this view, moral development is an increasing ability to differentiate and integrate perspectives of self and other in resolving moral conflicts and is the product of an interaction between the child's internal cognitive structures and the structural features of the social environment. It is promoted by social experiences that produce cognitive conflict and that provide the child with the opportunity to take the perspective of others.

In his theoretical writing, Kohlberg (1969) explicitly de-emphasized the importance of the family in the development of moral judgment and, like Piaget (1932/1965), focused on the peer group and schools. For example, he held that family participation, identification with specific parent figures, and parental warmth are not critically necessary for moral development; the family is merely one of several social institutions that promote moral development through the creation of role-taking opportunities and exposure to cognitive conflict. As in other social institutions, role-taking opportunities in the family are created by shared decision making, responsibility taking, communication, and participation in moral discussions.

Perhaps as a result of Kohlberg's de-emphasis on the importance of the family, research exploring the contribution of family factors to the development of moral judgment has been rather limited. There is, however, increasing empirical evidence that indicates that Kohlberg may have underestimated the importance of parental influence, parental warmth and affection, and positive family relationships in promoting children's moral development.

Cognitive-developmental studies that examined the contribution of the family to children's
moral judgment generally used Kohlberg's moral stages as the measure of moral development (Buck, Walsh, & Rothman, 1981; Dunton, 1989; Haan, Langer, & Kohlberg, 1976; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967; Holstein, 1969, 1972, 1975; Jurkovic & Prentice, 1974; Parikh, 1980; Powers, 1983; Shoffeitt, 1971; Speicher, 1985; Walker & Taylor, 1991). Indexes of family social environment have included parent and child reports of parental discipline techniques, parent moral judgment, parent and child reports of parent affectional warmth or affectional involvement, and observed interaction styles. Results of these studies are summarized next.

Discipline Techniques

Studies that examined relationships between parents' discipline techniques and children's moral judgment generally support Kohlberg's (1969) cognitive-developmental view that moral reasoning is promoted by providing social perspective-taking opportunities (Buck et al., 1981; Holstein, 1972; Parikh, 1980; Shoffeitt, 1971). That is, in two studies children's moral reasoning was positively related to reported parental use of inductive discipline techniques that emphasize reasoning, encourage the child to take the perspectives of others, and rationally teach the child to understand the consequences of actions to the self and others (Parikh, 1980; Shoffeitt, 1971). Conversely, all studies found that power-assertive and love-withdrawal discipline techniques were either unrelated or negatively related to children's moral judgment.

Parent Moral Judgment

Many of the studies that investigated parent and offspring moral judgment found some significantly positive relationships between the two, although results varied depending on the age of the children and sex of the parents and children (Buck et al., 1981; Dunton, 1989; Haan et al., 1976; Holstein, 1969, 1975; Parikh, 1980; Powers, 1983; Shoffeitt, 1971; Speicher, 1985; Walker & Taylor, 1991). One study (Speicher, 1985) that compared preadolescent to adult parent-child moral judgment correlations in two samples (one cross-sectional and one longitudinal) found that correlations between the two increased during late adolescence and adulthood, challenging Kohlberg's view of the family as one institution among many whose influence should decrease as the influence of other institutions increases.

Reported Affectional Warmth and Involvement

A third group of studies examined relationships between moral reasoning and self-report measures of parental affectional warmth and involvement. These studies also challenge Kohlberg's minimization of the importance of parental affection in the development of moral judgment (Fodor, 1973; Hart, 1988; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967; Holstein, 1969, 1975; Parikh, 1980; Shoffeitt, 1971). The combined results consistently indicate positive relationships between paternal warmth or affectional involvement and advanced moral development in children. Although reported differences in mothers' affection was consistently unrelated to differences in moral reasoning, two studies (Holstein, 1969; Shoffeitt, 1971) found that the strength of correlations between parent and child moral judgment was related to the amount of parents' affectionate involvement.

Observed Family Interaction

Finally, observational studies examined the quality of family interaction patterns in relation to adolescent moral judgment. The results of these studies again support the importance of positive interpersonal parent-child relationships in the moral development process. They also support Kohlberg's view that moral development is promoted by cognitive stimulation of moral reasoning (Buck et al., 1981; Holstein, 1969; Jurkovic & Prentice, 1974; Parikh, 1980; Powers, 1983; Walker & Taylor, 1991). The interactional variables that were most strongly related to advanced moral reasoning were parental encouragement of the adolescents' participation in family discussions (Holstein, 1969; Parikh, 1980); parental use of reasoning and parental warmth (Buck et al., 1981); low maternal dominance and hostility (Jurkovic & Prentice, 1974); maternal affective support (Powers, 1983); and parental discussion styles with high supportive
interactions and that elicit or re-present the reasoning of others (Walker & Taylor, 1991).

In summary, there is increasing empirical evidence that parental influence on their children's moral judgment development is probably greater than Kohlberg had originally assumed and that positive affectional relations between parent and child may promote moral development. There are, however, unresolved issues and questions to be explored. For instance, if patterns of parent-offspring moral judgment correlations differ depending on the age of the offspring and sex of the parent and child, are there differences in family environmental factors that stimulate moral reasoning in boys and girls and at different points in development?

The present study, which includes both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of relationships between moral judgment and parent and adolescent perceptions of family structure and interaction, represents an initial exploration of some of the unresolved issues. It is one of the few studies of family interaction and moral judgment in which Kohlberg Moral Judgment Interviews were scored using the final published Colby et al. (1987) moral judgment scoring system and in which background variables (age, parent moral judgment, IQ, sex of parent, and sex of child) were controlled in the data analyses.

The research questions of particular interest were as follows: (a) Is there a relationship between adolescent moral judgment and parent and adolescent reports of role-taking opportunities in the family social environment? (b) Is the reported quality of parent-adolescent and family relationships related to adolescent moral judgment? (c) Are there sex differences in patterns of relationships between adolescent moral judgment and perceptions of family interaction? (d) Are there longitudinal differences in patterns of family environmental factors that are related to moral judgment during adolescence and early adulthood?

Method

Subjects

The subjects in the present study included 50 mothers, 48 fathers, 48 sons, and 44 daughters who participated in two follow-up assessments of Oakland Growth Study (OGS; Jones, 1939) subjects and their families by the Institute of Human Development, University of California, Berkeley in 1969/1970 and 1975. At the first follow-up wave, the OGS parents ranged in age from 45 to 50 years; offspring ranged in age from 10 to 18 years.

In this study, the total sample consisted of 51 families, of which 47 were intact or reconstituted. Both parents were interviewed in intact families. In cases of divorce, the parent interviewed was the parent or parent figure who lived with the child during all or part of adolescence. In 22 of the 51 families, there was 1 adolescent subject; in 21 families there were 2 adolescent subjects; in 4 families there were 3 adolescent subjects; and in 4 families there were 4 adolescent subjects.

All of the subjects were White; most were natives of California; and few were employed in low-status occupations. In 1969/1970, the majority of the households were in the top three social classes (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958).

Measures

During the 1969/1970 follow-up wave, Kohlberg Moral Judgment Interviews were administered to all of the adolescent subjects and their parents; 21 of the adolescents were reinterviewed in 1975. In 1969/1970, individual parent and adolescent interviews, assessing perceptions of family interaction, were also administered to all parents and a subset of 60 adolescents. Fifty-one of the adolescents (19 boys and 32 girls) responded to a questionnaire, and 42 adolescents (18 boys and 24 girls) were individually interviewed. Thirty-four adolescent subjects (10 boys and 24 girls) responded to both the questionnaire and interview.

Moral judgment. Moral judgment was measured from responses to Kohlberg Moral Judgment Interviews (Colby et al., 1987), which were individually administered to OGS offspring and their parents by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley. There are three parallel forms (Forms A, B, and C) of the Kohlberg Moral Judgment Interview, each consisting of three hypothetical moral dilemmas and a series of probing questions designed to elicit the structure of the individual's moral reasoning and sociomoral perspective. Subjects interviewed in 1969/1970 responded to four dilemmas—two from Form A and two from Form C—whereas those interviewed in 1975 responded to three dilemmas—two from Form A and one from Form C.

All moral judgment interviews were anonymously scored by the investigator according to the Standard Issue Scoring System (Colby et al., 1987). Standard Issue Scoring is both a reliable and valid psychometric measure of moral judgment (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987), and, contrary to claims of gender bias in the Kohlberg stages and scoring system (Gilligan, 1982), there is no evidence of gender bias in Standard Issue Scoring. As noted by Thoma (1989, p. 534) in a review of this scoring system, "Women do not score lower than men, nor do they evidence moresequence violations in the longitudinal samples. Data pre-
sent by Colby and Kohlberg are convincing and have been supported elsewhere (see Walker, 1984)."

Interrater reliability was obtained from a subset of 30 parent and adolescent interviews, which were independently scored according to the Colby et al. (1987) system. Sixty-three percent of the interviews received identical scores based on the 9-point scale devised by Colby and Kohlberg (1987). Eighty-seven percent of the interviews received scores within one third of a stage. The Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient, based on continuous weighted average scores, was .92 and comparable to that reported by Colby and Kohlberg (1987).

**Background variables.** Intelligence was measured by Wechsler intelligence (IQ) tests, which were individually administered during the 1969/1970 follow-up study. Socioeconomic status was measured by the Hollingshead Index of Social Position (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958).

**Family structure and interaction.** Family structure and interaction were measured from lengthy, tape-recorded interviews administered to OGS parents and a subset of adolescent offspring during the 1969/1970 follow-up study. A subset of adolescents also responded to a questionnaire.

In the adult interview, parents were asked (a) how they would describe each child as a person, including the child's temperament, similarity to the self, personal satisfaction, concerns, worries, and disappointments; (b) how disagreements are handled in the family; (c) to whom the child is likely to turn if troubled; (d) whether husband and wife had different approaches to child rearing; (e) what the basic goals are as a parent; (f) how the parent conveyed ideas about right and wrong; (g) whether children asked questions about right and wrong; (h) whether children challenged parental ideas of right and wrong; (i) how the individual has changed as a result of being a parent; and (j) how they would evaluate themselves overall as a parent, including strengths and weaknesses.

In the children's interview, adolescents were asked (a) how they will describe each parent as a person, including temperament, interests, shared activities, similarity to the self, and understanding of the adolescent; (b) what their personal reactions were to each parent, including satisfaction, irritation, concerns, worries, and disappointments; (c) how each parent has influenced the adolescent as a person; (d) how family disagreements are resolved; (e) how much the family talks together, including the parent to which the adolescent is more likely to turn with troubles; (f) how parents convey ideas of right and wrong; and (g) who makes rules and how are they enforced.

The children's questionnaire asked (a) what influenced the adolescent's political and social views; (b) whose opinions had influenced the adolescent the most; (c) whether the adolescent felt free to discuss politics and controversial issues at home; (d) how much the adolescent actually discussed politics with his or her parents; and (e) how did their own parents' strictness compare with that of friends' parents.

All variables from the children's questionnaire were quantitative, Likert-type scale variables that were coded on the basis of the subjects' responses to questionnaire items. The variables from the adult and children's interviews were coded by Institute of Human Development researchers from transcribed interviews. Some of the interview variables were qualitative, nominal variables. Most, however, were quantitative, ordinal variables.

Interrater reliability was assessed for 10 raters on individual interview codes and varied according to the subjectivity of the codes. Reliability ranged from .09 to .82 for children's interview variables and from -.52 to 1.00 for adult interview variables.

Variables coded from the interviews and questionnaires were grouped into two main categories: family moral atmosphere and parent–adolescent and family relationships. The family moral atmosphere variables measured perceptions of family structure, decision making, value orientation, extent of political/moral discussion, and "methods of moral transmission." Variables that measured parent–adolescent and family relationships focused primarily on perceptions of relationships between the adolescent and each parent.

Family interaction variables that are consistent with Kohlberg's conception of role-taking opportunities and that should theoretically be related to more advanced moral judgment are (a) freedom to discuss politics and controversial issues at home; (b) extent of political discussion in the home; (c) methods of arriving at rules that include the child in the rule-making process; (d) resolution of family disagreements by argument, discussion, and negotiated compromise or by formal discussion and mutual decisions; (e) family moral transmission by drawing out the child's thoughts about wrongdoing, by encouraging the child to analyze moral positions, or by exposing the child to philosophical, humanitarian, and moral ideas; (f) the extent to which the child asks questions about or challenges the parents' moral positions; (g) the extent to which the family talks together; (h) deliberateness of communication; (i) openness of relationship; and (j) ease of communication with parents.

**Results**

To reduce the family interaction data to manageable form, several exploratory factor analyses were performed. However, methodological difficulties with the factor-analytic approach to this data became apparent with further analysis. When age and IQ were controlled in multiple regression equations, none of the factors remained significant predictors of adolescent moral judgment. In view of these results, which

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1 Information on the list of family interaction variables and variable codes, measured from the adult and adolescent interviews and adolescent questionnaire, may be obtained from Betsy Speicher.
suggested that adolescents' perceptions of family interaction were related to age and IQ as well as to moral judgment, all variables were individually analyzed. This procedure permitted statistical control of background variables (age, IQ, social class, and parent moral judgment) when these variables were also significantly related to offspring moral judgment. Serious misinterpretation of the data could have occurred if background variables had not been controlled.

Relationships between family interaction variables and adolescent moral judgment were analyzed first in the combined sample and then in each sex group. Each family member's report of family interaction was analyzed separately. For nominal variables, the statistic used to test the significance of the relationships was analysis of covariance, with age as the covariate; the measure of association was the beta statistic. The significance of category differences was tested by the Scheffé method of pairwise comparisons. For ordinal variables, partial correlations, with age controlled, were used to test the significance of the relationships.

**Family Interaction and Adolescent Moral Judgment**

**Moral atmosphere.** Analyses of relationships between offspring moral judgment and parent and adolescent perceptions of the family moral atmosphere indicated that, with age controlled, only 6 of 92 variables included in this category were significantly related to adolescent moral judgment. Although the number of significant family moral atmosphere variables was almost what would be expected by chance, 2 of these variables were theoretically meaningful, supporting the expectations of cognitive-developmental theory. Mothers of higher stage adolescents reported that their children were more likely to ask questions about their parents' morals ($r = .26, n = 78, p < .05$) and that they more frequently exposed their children to philosophical, humanitarian, and moral ideas as a means of moral transmission ($r = .21, n = 81, p < .01$) than mothers of lower stage adolescents. Both variables remained significant predictors of adolescent moral judgment after age, IQ, and parent moral judgment were controlled, $F(6, 61) = 4.60, p < .01$, and $F(6, 67) = 3.25, p < .025$, respectively.

**Parent-adolescent and family relationships.** In comparison to the moral atmosphere variables, there were notably more significant correlations between adolescent moral reasoning and variables measuring quality of the parent-adolescent and family relationships (Table 1). It is important to note, however, that these significant variables were measured almost exclu-
sively from the adolescents' perspective. Higher stage adolescents reported more family communication, more maternal warmth and affection, more positive feelings of satisfaction with their mothers, more parental support, and better interpersonal relationships within the family than did lower stage adolescents. Better interpersonal relationships in the family, a variable reflecting a greater propensity of family members to serve each other's needs, were also reported by mothers of higher stage adolescents ($r = .33, n = 84, p < .001$).

The only correlation that supported the expectations of cognitive-developmental theory was a relationship between higher stage reasoning and adolescent reports of greater family communication. However, this relationship did not remain significant after IQ and parent moral judgment were controlled. Variables that did remain significantly related to moral judgment after the background variables were controlled included (a) personal satisfaction with mother ($r = .37, p < .05$); (b) mothers' support ($r = .45, p < .05$); (c) affectionate quality of relationship with mother ($r = .59, p < .01$); and (d) interpersonal relations in the family. Adolescents who reported that family members served each other's needs when they appeared were over half a stage higher in moral judgment than those who reported that family members served each other's needs only when pressed to do so, and the differences remained significant after controlling for IQ and parent moral judgment, $F(5, 80) = 3.52, p < .01$. Mothers' perceptions of interpersonal relations in the family also remained significantly related to adolescent moral judgment after background variables had been controlled, $F(6, 61) = 6.55, p < .01$.

An examination of intercorrelations among the parent–adolescent and family relationship variables from the adolescent interview indicates that these variables were, in general, highly intercorrelated. For example, adolescents who perceived positive interpersonal relations in the family were also significantly more likely to report positive evaluations of, and satisfaction with, their mothers; a greater degree of maternal influence and communication; a more open relationship and deliberateness of communication with both parents; more family communication; more parental understanding and trust; and more maternal support and affection. The moderate to strong intercorrelations among variables measuring adolescent perceptions of their relationships with their families and parents suggest that a more generalized quality of interpersonal relationships is being measured rather than isolated aspects of family relationships.

Finally, variables from the children's questionnaire that were significantly related to adolescent moral judgment reflect cognitive stimulation. Higher stage adolescents were significantly more likely to report that books ($r = .42, n = 47, p < .01$) and statements of political figures ($r = .40, n = 48, p < .01$) had influenced their political and social views and that teachers ($r = .36, n = 45, p < .025$) had influenced them at present.

**Sex differences.** Although the small number of subjects in each sample precluded analysis of a number of variables, relationships between family interaction and offspring moral judgment were further analyzed by sex. There were differences in the patterns of variables that were related to male and female moral judgment in spite of the fact that $t$ tests for significant differences between variable means indicated that boys and girls did not differentially endorse the family and parent–adolescent relationship variables.

First, in the male sample, moral judgment was related almost exclusively to variables from the adolescent interview (Table 2) that measured positive dynamics in parent–adolescent and family relationships. Most of these variables remained significant predictors of sons' moral judgment after age, IQ, and parent moral judgment were controlled, including (a) the extent to which the family talks together ($r = .66, p < .05$); (b) deliberateness of communication with mother ($r = .66, p < .05$); (c) ease of communication with father ($r = .58, p < .05$); (d) evaluative description of father ($r = .86, p < .01$); (e) fathers' understanding ($r = .78, p < .01$); (f) mothers' support ($r = .83, p < .01$); and (g) fathers' support ($r = .80, p < .01$).

In the female sample (Table 3), affectionate quality of relationship with mother was the only variable from the adolescent interview measuring positive dynamics in the parent-
adolescent relationship that remained significantly related to moral judgment after age, IQ, and parent moral judgment were controlled ($r = .72, n = 15, p < .01$). This variable was not significantly related to moral judgment of male adolescents.

Second, among boys, the variables from the adolescent interview that were significantly related to moral judgment, as predicted by cognitive-developmental theory, measured extent of parent–adolescent and family communication. In addition, after age and mothers’ moral judgment were controlled, sons whose mothers reported more openness in the mother–son relationship were significantly higher in moral judgment than sons whose mothers reported less openness ($r = .48, n = 21, p < .05$).

Among girls, the variables that were related to moral judgment, as predicted by cognitive-developmental theory, reflected maternal use of cognitive moral transmission. After age, IQ,

### Table 3

**Relationship Between Adolescent Interview Variables and Adolescent Female Moral Judgment With Age Controlled**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent–adolescent relationship variable</th>
<th>Adolescent moral judgment</th>
<th>Mother variable</th>
<th>Father variable</th>
<th>Family variable</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extent family talks together</td>
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<td>Deliberateness of communication</td>
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<td>Openness of relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of communication with parents</td>
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<td>ns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal satisfaction with parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>.50* (24)</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointment in parents</td>
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<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents’ evaluation of adolescent</td>
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<td>Evaluative description of parents</td>
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<td>Parents’ support</td>
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<td>Parents’ trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affectionate quality of relationship</td>
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<td>.71** (17)</td>
<td>ns</td>
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*Note. Sample sizes are indicated in parentheses.  
*p < .05, two-tailed.  **p < .01, two-tailed.*
and parent moral judgment were controlled, the moral reasoning of daughters whose mothers reported using exposure to philosophical, humanitarian, and moral ideas as a means of moral transmission was significantly more mature than the reasoning of daughters whose mothers did not report using this method, $F(5, 30) = 4.81, p < .01$.

Although the pattern of significant relationships differed in the male and female samples, there were two consistent findings. First, in both samples, there was no relationship between moral judgment and variables that measured role-taking opportunities in family decision making or family structure. The second consistent finding was a relationship between moral judgment and mothers' reports of interpersonal relations in the family, a variable that remained a significant correlate of adolescent moral reasoning after controlling for age and IQ in the female sample, $F(3, 32) = 4.40, p < .01$.

**Five-Year Follow-Up Study**

Approximately 5 years after the major follow-up wave in 1969/1970, 21 OGS offspring were reassessed with the Kohlberg Moral Judgment Interview. The average age of the subjects at the time of the reinterview was 20 years. Only four variables that originally had been measured from the adolescent questionnaire were significantly predictive of moral reasoning 5 years later. Most of these variables reflected cognitive stimulation of moral reasoning. For example, adolescents who reported that books and political figures had influenced their political and social views were significantly more advanced in moral reasoning 5 years later. With respect to the family measures, all of the variables that predicted advanced moral judgment in later adolescence and young adulthood were moral atmosphere variables. Less parental strictness ($r = - .49, N = 21, p < .025$), more freedom to discuss politics and controversial issues at home ($r = .47, N = 21, p < .05$), and more political discussion at home ($r = .54, N = 21, p < .01$) reported during early and middle adolescence predicted more mature moral judgment in later adolescence and young adulthood.

**Discussion**

Contrary to the expectations of cognitive-developmental theory (Kohlberg, 1969), there were very few significant relationships between moral judgment and role-taking dimensions in the family moral atmosphere during early to middle adolescence. More mature moral judgment was unrelated to reports of democratic, child-participatory family structures and decision making. However, it was related to adolescent perceptions of qualities in the parent–adolescent relationship that democratic structures are assumed to promote: positive affective relationships, parent–child and family communication, and parental understanding and support. These results suggest that structural family characteristics, such as methods of decision making and rule enforcement, may be far less important than the quality of family relationships in the development of adolescent moral reasoning.

The importance of interpersonal family relationships in promoting development during adolescence is supported empirically by both the previously cited moral development studies and research on developmental outcomes during adolescence. Reviewers have consistently found associations between harmonious parent–adolescent relationships (adolescent perceptions of parents' emotional warmth, support, and extent of intrafamilial communication) and general psychological adjustment, ego identity, self-esteem, and nondelinquency (Conger, 1977; Gold & Petronio, 1980; Thomas, Gecas, Weigert, & Rooney, 1974; Weiner, 1970).

Two studies of adulthood adaptive functioning provide empirical support for the proposition that loving and supportive family relationships may be more important than structural features of the family environment in adaptation, growth, and well-being at older ages as well. In a follow-up study of subjects from Sears, Maccoby, and Levin's (1957) *Patterns of Child-Rearing* sample, Franz, McClelland, and Weinberger (1991) found that both maternal and paternal warmth, measured at age 5 years, significantly predicted adult social accomplishment 36 years later. In addition, in a study of 2,440 men ranging in age from 17 to 68 years, Green, Harris, Forte, and Robinson (1991) found that individual and marital well-being
was linearly related to family cohesion but not to family structural adaptability.

A conceptual argument for the importance of positive interpersonal family relationships in the development of adolescent moral judgment is the emergence of Stage 3 conventional reasoning during early and middle adolescence. Stage 3 moral judgments evidence concern with having good motives, showing concern for others, following the golden rule, and maintaining interpersonal relationships through trust, loyalty, and mutual respect. It makes conceptual sense that positive parent–adolescent relationships would foster, or at least support, the development of Stage 3 reasoning.

In the present sample, Stage 4 moral reasoning began to develop only in later adolescence (16–18 years). At Stage 4, moral judgments are made from a societal (rather than interpersonal) perspective with a focus on generalized moral and social laws and the effects of actions on the welfare of society as a whole. During earlier adolescence, when Stage 3 was developing and consolidating, moral judgment was related to positive parent–adolescent and family relationships and to role-taking dimensions within these relationships.

During later adolescence and young adulthood (when Stages 4 and 5 were developing and consolidating), moral judgment was predicted by reported comfort with, and frequency of, family moral and political discussions. These findings suggest that the role of family environmental factors in the development of moral reasoning may change depending on the developmental maturity and stage of the adolescent. Interpersonal family relationships may be more important during earlier adolescence, whereas more cognitive and perspective-taking dimensions in the family moral atmosphere may be more important during later adolescence and early adulthood.

In both the present study and an intervention study cited in Sullivan, Beck, Joy, and Pagliuso (1975), moral discussion during adolescence had a "sleeper effect": greater participation in moral discussions in school and at home was unrelated to moral reasoning during adolescence but did predict moral judgment maturity several years later. Moral and political discussion during adolescence may have fostered an interest in moral dialogue and contributed to the capacity for moral reflection and responsiveness to change during late adolescence and early adulthood.

Finally, differential identification with, and relative importance of, the same-sex parent in the moral judgment development of adolescents was suggested by the greater son–father and daughter–mother orientation in the variables that were correlated with moral reasoning. In the male sample, particularly with background variables controlled, there were a greater number of significant relationships between moral judgment and father–son relationship variables than between moral judgment and mother–son relationship variables. Conversely, in the female sample, there were no significant relationships between moral judgment and variables that measured positive father–daughter relationships. However, moral reasoning of girls was strongly related to perceptions of mothers' affectional warmth.

This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Hart (1988), who studied socialization and identification as predictors of adult moral judgment development in the Kohlberg's (1958) original sample. Paternal affection, involvement, and identification, measured during adolescence, were predictive of sons' moral judgment during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Maternal identification and involvement were unrelated to sons' moral judgment at any age.

The sex differences also suggest that boys may be more influenced by cognitively mediated aspects of the parent–adolescent relationship and girls more by direct affectional relationships. An equally plausible, but counterintuitive, argument from these data is that family relationships are more important in the moral reasoning of boys than girls. Given the small number of subjects, however, any interpretation regarding sex differences must be made cautiously and considered as hypotheses for further research.

Interpretation of the results of this study must also include an awareness of additional methodological limitations. First, interrater reliability coefficients of some of the more subjective family interaction variables were sometimes low. It is, therefore, important to interpret consistencies in the patterns of results rather than individual variables. Second, multiple relation-
ships within a family were included in the data analyses so that the observations were not statistically independent. Finally, the research is correlational, and a direct linear relationship between perceptions of family interaction and adolescent moral judgment cannot be assumed. As argued by proponents of contextualism, there is, in all likelihood, a mutually influential relationship between the adolescent and the family social environment, with each acting on the other in a dynamic interaction.

There are, however, reasonable grounds for making some tentative causal inferences. First, data analyses were performed after controlling for the effects of potentially confounding variables. Second, separate analyses of parent and adolescent reports of family interaction permitted the exploration of consistent patterns of results. Finally, strong convergent validity is suggested by the consistency of patterns of results found in the present study with findings from other moral and adolescent development research. The confluence of results strongly suggests the importance of family relationships in the moral, social, and emotional development of adolescents.

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