THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-MORAL MEANING MAKING:

DOMAINS, CATEGORIES, AND PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an integrative approach to social cognitive and moral development by showing how descriptive (social) and prescriptive (moral) reasoning are interconnected in socio-moral meaning making. It is argued that socio-moral meaning making is based on processes of perspective differentiation and coordination through which persons come to understand descriptive and prescriptive aspects of social reality. In order to clarify structure and content aspects of socio-moral reasoning, first, conflicting theoretical positions about perspective-taking and domains of reasoning are discussed. Second, a reinterpretation of structure and content aspects of socio-moral meaning making in an action-theoretical framework is proposed. Third, this approach is exemplified with reference to longitudinal data about the development of socio-moral meaning making in a morally relevant conflict in a close friendship.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the development of socio-moral meaning making in intimate relationships such as friendship. We argue that growing interpersonal and moral awareness is based on processes of perspective differentiation and coordination through which persons come to understand descriptive aspects (what is the case) and prescriptive aspects (what ought to be the case) of social relations. Thus we pursue an integrative approach to social cognitive and moral development by showing how descriptive and prescriptive aspects of social reasoning are interconnected in the developing understanding of relationships and moral rules.

Three basic assumptions characterize this approach:

1.   We understand the unfolding of socio-moral meaning as the construction in and through development of a naive theory of social action. In the course of development, the categories of the naive theory of social action are differentiated and coordinated into more encompassing systems of meaning.

2.   A central part of socio-moral meaning making is the development of a conception of self as an intentional and responsible agent.

3,   The different forms of organization of the categories of the naive theory of social action and moral agency can be described and explained in terms of processes of perspective differentiation and coordination.

In the following we *first*, discuss conflicting theoretical positions about the concept of perspective-taking in social and moral development. *Second*, we develop our own approach to socio-moral meaning making and, *third*, empirical data are presented about the development of notions of obligation and responsibility in friendship.

PERSPECTIVE-TAKING AND DOMAINS OF SOCIAL AND MORAL REASONING

The cognitive-structural tradition reaches back to the work of Piaget (1970, 1983) and Mead (1934). The focus of concern in this tradition is on formal competence to differentiate and coordinate perspectives of self and other. But because structural theories neglect content, significant aspects of interaction, the intrapsychic world of self and others (e.g., feelings, intentions, expectations) and the types of relationships and social rules that serve to coordinate the transactions of self and other have virtually been ignored by these theories. Only recently have domains and categories of social reasoning been specified. Two contradictory positions have been formulated with regard to the meaning of perspective-taking and the meaning of content domains in social cognition: On the one hand Selman (1980) and Kohlberg (1976, 1984) distinguished the two broad domains of descriptive social understanding and prescriptive moral judgment. The concept of perspective-taking represents the logical core of these two domains. On the other hand Turiel (1983a, 1983b) has argued that different domains of social reasoning represent distinct conceptual systems with distinct organizational features. The concept of perspective-taking is defined as a cognitive skill which is not amenable to description in structural terms. These contrasting positions will be discussed.

The Position of Kohlberg and Selman

According to Kohlberg (1984; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) and Selman (1980) the domain of *descriptive* social reasoning encompasses reflections on the psychological states of the self, on other persons, and on relationships between persons. The *prescriptive* domain encompasses deontic judgments of what is right and obligatory in terms of moral standards that regulate relationships between persons. Both Selman and Kohlberg argue that the two realms form distinct conceptual systems but that they develop in parallel sequences. To account for content, both realms are subdivided into subdomains and categories. Thus, Selman distinguishes the understanding of persons from the understanding of relationships. Within the domain of "persons" specific categories of understanding are differentiated, such as understanding the subjective world of others in terms of thoughts, feelings, and motives. Within the subdomain of "relations" the concept of friendship is defined by categories such as closeness, trust, and conflict resolution. In the domain of prescriptive reasoning content is represented through the different types of moral rules or norms (issues) such as property, promise-keeping, or authority and the moral values (elements) supporting the validity of these norms.

Within each domain reasoning is taken to be homogeneous, and both authors present empirical evidence to the effect that stages form structured wholes (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs & Lieberman, 1983; Selman, 1980). Thus, content aspects in social and moral reasoning seem to be of little developmental importance. According to Kohlberg and Selman the consistency found in the two domains is due to the structure of perspective-taking, which is seen as the organizational or logical core common to both descriptive and prescriptive reasoning. Selman (1980) defined five levels of social perspective-taking which form a hierarchically ordered sequence in which each lower level is integrated into a more differentiated and more complex level above it. The sequence starts with level 0 where the child confuses the perspectives of self and other. At level 1 perspectives of self and other can be differentiated and the individual realizes that thoughts and feelings of self and others can be distinct. At level

2 perspectives of self and other are coordinated in the sense that self knows that other can consider self's subjective viewpoints and that self can reflect on his or her own subjectivity. At level 3 self and other can mutually and simultaneously reflect on each other's subjective points of view. At level 4 a general societal viewpoint is constructed that transcends individual perspectives. This formal sequence of perspective fusion, differentiation, and various forms of coordination of perspectives is reconstructed within the different content domains and categories of social reasoning.

In his recent research, Selman (Selman, Beardslee, Schultz, Krupa & Podorefsky, 1986) has used the concept of perspective-taking as a heuristic tool for the analysis of understanding strategies of interaction both at the conceptual and at the behavioral level. It is noteworthy that when the focus is on interpersonal strategies (which in fact represent a content category within the subdomain of understanding relationships, namely the issue of conflict resolution) different types of relations are treated as content categories. Thus, friendship and authority relationships represent different contexts for the analysis of interpersonal negotiations (Adalbjarnardóttir & Selman, 1989). We shall return to this question below.

In Kohlberg's work two contrary positions can be distinguished with regard to the concept and the meaning of perspective taking in moral judgment. In his earlier statements, Kohlberg (1976) distinguished a descriptive social perspective and a prescriptive socio-moral perspective: „From our point of view, however, there is a more general structural construct which underlies both role-taking and moral judgment. This is the concept of socio-moral perspective, which refers to the point of view the individual takes in defining both social facts and socio-moral values or oughts" (p. 33). Thus a socio-moral perspective is taken to underlie both descriptive social reasoning and prescriptive moral judgment.

In his later work Kohlberg appears to adopt a different position: „Let us again say that we believe the perspective- taking underlying the moral stages is intrinsically moral in nature rather than a logical or social-cognitive structure applied to the moral domain. In this interpretation we agree with Turiel (1979) and Damon (1983) in their contention that there are many types of perspective-taking, each of which develops separately, although not necessarily independently, as a result of experience in a particular domain. In this view spatial, social, and moral perspective-taking are fundamentally different processes rather than applications of a single general structure to different content areas" (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987, p. 16). Although the basic distinction between a descriptive social and a prescriptive moral perspective is maintained here, it is no longer claimed that the latter represents a more general structure underlying both social and moral reasoning and defining both social facts and moral values. The assumed general structure has been transformed into partial structures of perspective-taking, among which moral or *prescriptive* perspective-taking represents but one.

This socio-moral perspective defines the types of relationship between the self and society's moral rules and expectations (Kohlberg, 1976; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). At the preconventional level — the first two stages of moral judgment — the perspective is that of "isolated individuals," a perspective where social expectations are something external to the self. Stage 1 perspective represents the naive generalization of the concrete individual's point of view. Different interests of others are neither recognized nor considered. At stage 2 an awareness of different points of view emerges and the solution of moral conflicts is determined by pragmatic exchanges. "At stage two, in serving my interests, I anticipate the other guy's reaction, negative or positive, and he anticipates mine. (And, the present authors would add: I know that he anticipates mine). Unless we make a deal, each will put his own point of view first. If we make a deal each of us will do something for the other" (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987, p. 23). At the conventional level — stages 3 and 4 of moral judgment — the person takes the shared viewpoint of the participants in a relationship or a group. The stage 3 perspective is that of a member of relationships where shared feelings and expectations take primacy over individual interests. At stage 4 the member-of-society perspective serves to assess individual relationships in view of their function in the social system that defines rules and roles. The postconventional level — stages 5 and 6 of moral judgment — is characterized as the perspective of any rational moral human being. This implies the distinction between moral and legal points of view: „That is, the moral perspective is a prior-to-society view of basic human rights and welfare, and social systems are seen as derivative from this prior, ethical perspective." The socio-moral perspective forms the structural core of the level specific moral judgments as assessed through the different content-issues (Colby et al., 1987).

Turiel's Position

Turiel (1983a, 1983b) has established a comprehensive frame of reference for the study of social and moral reasoning. He proposed three broad domains that in his view correspond to well-defined domains of social reality that are also the object space of specific social science disciplines (psychology, sociology/anthropology, and moral philosophy): These three domains are defined as follows:

1.   The psychological domain encompasses knowledge or concepts of persons, including self and others, with regard to psychological attributes such as feelings, motives, intentions as well as stable or enduring personality characteristics.
2.   The social domain contains knowledge about how people interact or relate to each other, more specifically about social rules and conventions, social roles, relations and institutions.
3.   The moral domain refers to knowledge about what is right in terms of concepts of justice (or other moral principles).

This domain classification is not incompatible with that of Selman and Kohlberg as far as the demarcation of content domains and categories is concerned. Yet, Turiel differs from Kohlberg and Selman in the amount of specificity he ascribes to such content domains in terms of underlying organization and structure. The knowledge systems, even within domains, do not necessarily form structured wholes. Rather they are taken to represent partial structures, each with their own organizational principles and developmental logic. It is the task of the researcher to define meaningful domains, delineate the boundaries between them, and reconstruct their developmental logic.

Furthermore, in Turiel's view, the concept of perspective-taking has no explanatory function for the structural organization of such content domains. In contradistinction to the definition of *domains of knowledge* as objects of structural analysis, perspective-taking is defined as a *method* of gaining information about the social world. Some examples follow: Knowledge about behaviors and psychological states (thoughts and feelings); knowledge of social groups, and of rules, laws and regulations of social systems. Through the use of the method of perspective-taking the individual attempts to reproduce what is given in the external environment. The method therefore does not constitute an organized system and does not undergo structural change. Rather, with increasing age there may be *quantitative* changes in methods, such as increments in their accuracy and scope (Turiel, 1983a, p. 70). Thus, in contradistinction to the cognitive-structural position that Selman and Kohlberg adopt, perspective differentiation and coordination is not the central cognitive process in the construction of meaning within knowledge systems. Rather it is interpreted as an "information processing skill" in the service of acquisition or reproduction of information about different aspects of the social world.

RECONSTRUCTING PERSPECTIVE-TAKING: STRUCTURE AND CONTENT ASPECTS OF SOCIO-MORAL MEANING MAKING

The distinction of structure and content aspects in social and moral reasoning is a necessary and relevant task. Yet at present sufficient clarification of this question has not been achieved. There are problems with regard to both structure and content aspects. In what follows our concern is first with the system for classifying content and then with the structural aspect.

While the differentiation of descriptive and prescriptive social cognition and the within-domain differentiation of persons, relations, and rules represent necessary conceptual distinctions, the reconstruction of their meaning — whether in general or in the context of defining and solving specific problems — necessarily draws on more than one category. Therefore, understanding within one domain must be seen, in principle, as mediated by the others. We exemplify this with reference to the concept of friendship, which is central for the empirical data presented in this chapter. Reconstructing the meaning of a relationship such as friendship necessarily implies understanding of the intrapsychic dimensions of persons, such as their feelings, intentions, or expectations

towards each other. On the other hand, understanding friendship involves not only descriptive, but also prescriptive knowledge according to which actions, feelings, intentions, expectations, or persons performing such actions or characterized by such intrapsychic processes are judged as responsible or irresponsible in the light of normative standards of how one ought to act as a good friend. Thus, friendship cannot be exclusively subsumed under the domain of descriptive social reasoning or knowledge. Rather, it depends on the person and the situation or context whether in reconstructing the meaning of friendship descriptive or prescriptive aspects become salient.

Furthermore, in making descriptive or prescriptive judgments, persons may draw on the same conceptual categories, e.g., feelings, intentions, expectations or relations. Thus, in our opinion, there is no reason to distinguish between social, and socio-moral perspective-taking, as Kohlberg (p. 6) proposes. Rather, perspective-taking operates in either descriptive or prescriptive contexts. It is an empirical question to determine which categories persons use in reconstructing the meaning of actions, relations, and rules in different contexts (e.g., descriptive or prescriptive) at different points in development.

Socio-moral Meaning Making as the Development of Naive Concepts of Action

In an earlier work we proposed that the distinction between components and categories of socio-moral meaning making should be derived from the concept of action (Keller & Reuss, 1984). This approach was predicated on the assumption that socio-moral meaning making develops in contexts of human action (Damon, 1989; Eckensberger, 1984). Thus, the study of socio-moral meaning making calls for a phenomenological and hermeneutic approach where the focus is on the person's construction and interpretation of situations.

The categories of socio-moral meaning making concerning a specific action context comprise both typical (general) and situation-specific knowledge about actions, persons, and relationships, as well as rules governing interactions and relationships. They refer to both social facts (what is the case) and moral facts (what ought to be the case in view of normative standards). *Descriptive* social knowledge refers to social facts or explanatory categories, such as "reasons for action" in terms of a person's intentions. Descriptive social knowledge encompasses subjective preferences, hopes, interests, expectations, or feelings as well as knowledge about consequences of actions for others, self and the relationship between self and other; finally knowledge about strategies that serve to achieve certain goals. *Prescriptive* knowledge refers to actions that are allowed, prohibited, responsible, or irresponsible in view of normative standards, such as moral or conventional standards. This type of knowledge refers to shared or intersubjectively valid norms or values according to which the members of a group, or people in general, ought to orient their behavior. These norms provide persons not only with "reasons for action" in the sense of descriptive social cognition, but with "good" or "prima facie" and morally justified reasons (Ross, 1963) and with evaluative standards according to which actions or persons are judged in cases of complying with or violating norms. From the validity claims of these norms individuals derive the knowledge that certain intentions and the means used to pursue them are responsible or irresponsible. Violations of normative standards give rise to external or internal (self-evaluative) sanctions (e.g., anticipation of punishment or guilt) and call for acts of compensation, such as justifications or excuses (Döbert & Nunner-Winkler, 1978; Keller, 1984a; Sykes & Matza, 1957). On the other hand, acting in accordance with normative standards may give rise to external or internal evaluations (e.g., anticipation of praise or pride).

The naive concepts or theories of action represent typified knowledge available to persons for the interpretation of situations (Schütz, 1967). It may be more or less differentiated and more or less comprehensive and more or less general or situation-specific. It is accessible to consciousness in principle (Toulmin, 1974), but it may, in general, function as background or „tacit knowledge" (Cicourel, 1978; Edelstein & Keller, 1982; Glick, 1978) from which the specific interpretation of a situation and the process of negotiation of conflicting claims is derived more or less implicitly.

The components of the naive theories of action represent the content on which the processes of perspective-taking operate. The relevant components of the naive theories of action can be summarized as follows (see also Keller & Reuss, 1984): They comprise typical (general) or situation-specific knowledge about *actions*, *persons*,

and *situations.* This includes the representation of *persons,* self, and others, in terms of their intentionality: motives, feelings, expectations, and subjective preferences; the representation of *relationships* and the *regularities* and *rules* governing actions and relationships; the representation of *consequences* of actions for persons (including the self) as well as for the relationship between persons; *normative standards* that call for or prohibit actions; *evaluative standards* that permit to judge actions and persons (in terms of short-term psychological attributes or long-term dispositions); and *regulatory strategies* serving to maintain relationships or reestablish a moral balance in the case of the violation of normative standards.

Socio-moral Development as the Development of a Conception of Agency and Responsibility

Socio-moral development implies growing awareness of the self as an intentional and responsible agent. To function in social reality the self must be aware of the concerns of others since only such awareness will enable the self to maintain relationships. The individual thus has to take into account the standards of rightness that define certain actions or intentions as acceptable or inacceptable in the light of one's responsibilities toward others. The development of a conception of a responsible self encompasses both cognitive and affective processes. Cognitively, any person in order to be able to engage in relationships with other persons must be aware of normative standards, of the consequences that violations of such standards have for those concerned, and of actions that serve to compensate violations of the legitimate concerns of others. As a person's naive concepts of action develop, he or she comes to experience him- or herself as an intentional and responsible agent. He or she begins to anticipate the evaluation of actions by others and to experience the necessity to justify, excuse, or compensate violations of another person's legitimate concerns. In order to achieve this task adequately, persons must not only be able to understand concerns of others. They must also feel responsible for the consequences of their actions for others. This implies empathy with others' feelings and concerns (Eisenberg, 1982; Hoffman, 1975, 1984) as well as the development of a self-evaluative system. The self-evaluative system leads to feelings of shame or guilt when the concerns of others have been violated or when others have been treated unfairly or irresponsibly (Keller, 1984b; Melden, 1977). Such feelings are basic to the motivation to morally compensate for the effects of unfair or irresponsible actions, e.g., by providing justifications or excuses. The self-evaluative system includes the development of the 'moral ideal' (Blasi, 1984; Damon, 1984) that functions as a standard according to which moral choices are made. Positive moral feelings are derived from action in congruence with such standards. Thus, empathic feelings as well as the cognitions and feelings derived from the self-evaluative system serve to regulate moral judgment and action.

The Role of Perspective-taking in the Development of Naive Concepts of Action and of Responsibility

The development of the categories of naive concepts of action and the development of responsibility derive from complex operations of perspective differentiation and coordination. Through these operations individuals construct the meaning of the social world and of the self as part of this social world. The self comes to understand how his or her actions influence others and others' view on the self. It is through the self-reflective structure of the perspective-taking process that intersubjectivity is established.

We thus agree with the position adopted by Selman and Kohlberg that processes of perspective differentiation and coordination constitute the core structure of social and moral reasoning. However, we do not agree with Kohlberg's distinction of a social-descriptive and a socio-moral prescriptive perspective. We propose that perspective-taking is the fundamental organizational structure through which naive concepts and categories of action are differentiated and coordinated in both descriptive and prescriptive knowledge and reasoning.

We approach the concept of perspective-taking in the framework of theories of social action (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Habermas, 1984; Lidz & Meyer Lidz, 1976; Mead, 1934) starting from the assumption that perspective-taking is a fundamental process in human interaction and communication, grounded

in interaction as interaction is grounded in perspective-taking. In the symbolic-interactionist tradition where the concept originates (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), perspective-taking was defined as a process of interpretation that serves to establish interaction and mutual consent. This requires that the interacting subjects be reflexively oriented towards the *meaning* of each other's actions (Lidz & Meyer Lidz, 1976). Thus, negotiating the meaning of a situation and achieving mutual consent implies cognitive processes of structuring and restructuring the different aspects of the situation. It is in this process that perspective-taking and the reflexive orientation towards the self that is made possible by perspective-taking play a major role.

In an action-theoretical framework the concept of reciprocal expectations takes on both descriptive and prespective meaning. By taking the perspective of the other, persons are able to coordinate their expectations and understand them as mutual, and thus develop a notion of the expectability both of behaviors and of expectations about behavior (Parsons, 1964). The concept of expectation has explanatory (predictive) meaning in the framework of descriptive social cognition when shared meaning about actions is established. In the normative framework of ethics, however, the concept of expectability implies mutually accepted and binding patterns of action (Habermas, 1984). The members of a social group are justified in expecting certain types of behaviors in certain situations. This legitimacy is derived from the intersubjectively shared norms that regulate behavior in certain situations. In this normative framework, understanding action means to be able to reconstruct it with regard to reciprocal expectability and to differentiate between subjective preferences and moral preferability (Keller & Reuss, 1984; Lenk, 1979). Understanding social processes and social regularities such as moral or conventional norms, social roles, and institutions means the ability to reconstruct such generalized patterns of action or invariances of interaction that derive from the validity of norms.

In order to be fully justifiable and morally acceptable, action must be oriented toward the reciprocity of complementary perspectives (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Therefore, when assessing the validity and generalizability of a norm (Habermas, 1984) and establishing a moral point of view (Hare, 1952; Rawls, 1972) the role switch between those performing an action and those concerned by the effects of an action and the generalized (reflective) perspective of the independent observer are critically important.

We therefore argue against the redefinition of perspective-taking as an information-processing skill as Turiel (1983a, 1983b) proposed. Rather, perspective-taking is taken to represent the formal structure of coordination of the perspectives of self and other as they relate to the different categories of people's naive theories of action. The differentiation and coordination of the categories of action and the self-reflexive structure of this process are basic to those processes of development and socialization in which children come to reconstruct the meaning of social interaction in terms of both what *is* the case and what *ought* to be the case in terms of morally responsible action. In order to achieve the task of establishing consent and mutually acceptable lines of action in situations of conflicting claims and expectations, a person has to take into account the intersubjective aspects of the situation that represent the generalizable features, as well as the subjective aspects that represent the viewpoints of the persons involved in the situation. In its fully developed form, this complex process of regulation and interaction calls for the existence and operation of complex socio-moral knowledge structures and a concept of self as a morally responsible agent. The ability to differentiate and coordinate the perspectives of self and other thus is a necessary condition both in the development of socio-moral meaning making and in the actual process of solving situations of conflicting claims.

CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

The naive concepts of action and the conception of a moral self must be reconstructed within specific action contexts. It is an empirical question which specific content categories of the naive theories of action are differentiated within given action contexts, how the categories are coordinated in the interpretation and solution of action problems, and which conception of agency or responsibility is achieved at different points in development. Action context refers to both the *content* categories of the naive theories of action (such as different types of rules or norms or different types of relationship) and the type of *situation* in which the categories are assessed (such as reasoning about a dilemma or interacting in a situation of social conflict). The literature concerned with

social cognitive and moral development (Damon, 1980, 1989; Eisenberg, 1982; Rest, 1983; Shantz, 1983; Turiel, 1983) presents evidence that the specific action context is important in the person's socio-moral meaning making. Otherwise ,there would be no explanation of the obvious décalages in the use of categories and processes. Examples of such décalages between contexts and/or contents of socio-moral functioning have been found in the development of empathic understanding (Eisenberg, 1982; Hoffman, 1983, 1984) and in the understanding of moral rules by young children (Dunn, 1987; Turiel, 1983a, 1983b). Thus, children at an early age show empathic concerns in their interactions (Hoffman, 1975, 1983, 1984) and an awareness of moral rules (Dunn, 1987). In rather simply structured situations where the validity of a moral rule is at stake (Turiel, 1983b), preschoolers take an internally oriented moral point of view by showing empathic concern for the feelings of others, and judge moral norms such as physical integrity as universally valid compared to conventional norms, such as dressing conventions. In Kohlberg's dilemmas of conflicting moral duties even adolescents appear externally orientied, i.e., motivated by sanctions, punishment and authority, or concern for self's interests (see Keller, Eckensberger, & von Rosen, 1989, for a critique).

Given these findings, it is plausible to expect that the moral stage scores achieved by 10- or 12-year-olds in Kohlberg's study (stage 1 or stage 2 at best, Colby et al., 1983) should be viewed as specific to the task in which conflicting moral obligations have to be weighed against each other. Conversely, it does not appear plausible that these stage scores indicate the general level of children's moral competence as tapped by their interpersonal and moral understanding. In other words, it is not plausible that children scoring at the preconventional level of moral judgment should be generally unable to recognize different interests in a moral conflict, or that children should be generally unable to consider actions in terms of the psychological interests of others, and that they should not possess a conception of obligation. As expected, the literature reports evidence that children and adolescents not only possess rich understanding of the psychological world in terms of motives, feelings, and intentions (Flavell & Ross, 1981; Shantz, 1983), but also of moral rules (Damon, 1989; Kagan & Lamb, 1987; Turiel, 1983a, 1983b).

The relevant parameters for the appraisal of context are, of course, largely conjectural at this point. However, types of relationship such as reasoning about authority or peer relationships (Damon, 1989; Youniss, 1980), or types of moral rules such as moral duties (Colby et al., 1983) or moral responsibilities (Eisenberg, 1982; Gilligan, 1982) are promising candidates. Further, it is necessary to take into account the *type* of situation where moral agents interact.

The Development of Socio-Moral Meaning Making in Friendship: Results of a Longitudinal Study

Next, we present empirical data that exemplify the development of naive theory of action and of moral responsibility in the context of reasoning about an action problem in close friendship (Keller, 1984b).

Method and Sample

Socio-moral understanding was assessed in a longitudinal study of 121 subjects at the ages 7, 9, 12, and 15 years (57 female, 64 male). Subjects were interviewed about an everyday action dilemma occurring between friends. The dilemma was based on Selman's (1980) friendship dilemma. The protagonist (actor) promised to meet his or her best friend on their special meeting day. Later, the protagonist receives a more attractive invitation from a third child (movie or pop concert depending on age) who has only recently moved into the neighborhood. This invitation happens to be at the same time the protagonist had promised to meet the best friend. Various psychological details are mentioned that complicate matters further, for example that the best friend has problems he or she wants to talk about and that he or she does not like the new child.

Since the interpretation and the solution of the dilemma involve clashes of interest as well as conflicts between norms, an adequate reconstruction of meaning entails both descriptive and prescriptive aspects. During the

interview the categories of the naive theory of action and of a moral self become increasingly salient. The interview is structured according to the phases of an action sequence.

First, in the phase of orientation, the subject has to define the action problem in a preliminary way. *Second*, the subject has to make a (hypothetical) choice for the protagonist and to give reasons for the choice as well as for the alternative option. Reasons can refer to preferences or preferability and thus give rise to the consideration of problematic or illegitimate aspects of a choice in terms of self's responsibility. *Third*, these considerations are reflected in anticipation and (moral) evaluation of consequences of choices for those concerned (protagonist, best friend, new child). *Fourth*, the subject explores regulative strategies that are available to avoid or compensate unintended and undesirable consequences for self and others. *Fifth*, the action choice is evaluated in terms of moral rightness. Intensive awareness of the problematic aspects of the conflict may result in a revision of the action choice and thus in a renewed sequence of evaluating preferences and consequences in the light of (moral) preferability. Depending on the ability to differentiate and coordinate the categories of the naive theory of action, the coordination of different phases of action can take place successively (for example, when consequences are regulated after facts have been established) or simultaneously (for example, when consequences are anticipated and taken into account in making an action choice).

Scoring

Developmental levels were determined for the arguments given in each category. Levels vary from the lowest level 0 to the highest level 3 with transitional levels (e.g., 0/1, 1/2, 2/3). Exact percentage agreement for sub-levels varied between 75% and 100% for the categories. Average agreement across categories within age groups was 86%, 86%, 85%, and 89% for the 7-, 9-, 12, and 15-year-olds.

Qualitative Results
Levels of Socio-moral Meaning Making[1]

In the following the developmental levels of socio-moral meaning-making and moral agency are described. Table 4.1 summarizes this information (see Table 4.1).

TABLE 4.1.
Developmental Levels of Socio-Moral Meaning Making: Differentiation and Coordination of Action Categories

Level	Conception of Perspectives	Conception of Actions and of (Moral) Agency
0	no differentiation between subjective perspectives	isolated actions no conception of action conflicts no sense of agency
1	differentiation of subjective perspectives from the viewpoint of given needs, interests, expectations beginning coordination in terms of action sequences (action in reaction to action)	construction of an elementary action conflict agency as: ---awareness of conflicting options ---anticipation of (intended and unintended) consequences of choices (cognitive expectations)
2	beginning differentiation of subjective perspectives in light of intersubjective perspectives coordination of perspectives from the viewpoint of what is legitimate in terms of shared standards (beginning of a relationship perspective)	conflict of action as conflict of relationship actions/interactions evaluated in terms of obligations and responsibilities as concrete behavioral requirements agency as knowledge about obligations (normative expectations)
3	full intersubjectivity integration of a generalized perspective (norms) with a particular perspective (persons, situations) (generalization and individuation) ideal role-switch	Actions and interactions are evaluated in light of general and personalized obligations and responsibilities actions oriented towards establishment and maintenance of trust agency as personal commitment to norms (moral responsibility) consense orientation

Level 0. At level 0 no differentiation between the subjective perspectives of self and other has emerged. The situation is not yet interpreted in terms of conflicting claims, i.e., in terms of self's needs and interests versus other's (friend's) needs, interests, or expectations. Self's mostly hedonistic perspective is attributed to other as well (friend wants to go to the movie). Therefore, no differentiation is possible between preferences and preferability (in the sense of what would be right to do). The preferential behavior is not yet oriented towards the re–presentation of alternative options, goals, or action strategies. Action decisions are primarily oriented towards objects (movie, toys) while disregarding intersubjective invariances and established action patterns in the context of an ongoing relationship (friendship). Persons are representatives of certain gratifying objects, and perceived in their instrumental function (offers made to the actor). Relations are not organized over time nor are they tied to specific persons, or specified by definite characteristics (such as old friendship, situation of new child). Actor may achieve a first differentiation of subjective perspectives with regard to the anticipation of various consequences of decisions for ego and alter: satisfaction of needs leads to positive feelings, dissatisfaction to negative ones. Thus, even when negative consequences of self's action decision for other are anticipated (friend will feel bad if actor goes to movie), such understanding does not have a regulatory or modifying function for self's preferences concerning decisions, goals, and means. Consequences are interpreted in terms of "effects" for which the actor is not yet held responsible. Actions are not perceived as objects of justification so that no necessity is felt to devise strategies of compensation for negative consequences for other. Strategic and communicative forms of action are not yet differentiated even in the most elementary form.

Level 1. At this level a beginning differentiation between subjective-particular and intersubjectively *right* perspective emerges (actor should go to the friend). At this level subjective perspectives of self and other are differentiated in terms of specific needs, interests, and expectations and can be perceived as conflicting (actor wants to go to the movie, friend wants actor to come). Expectations achieve quasi-normative status resulting, first, from ego's declaration of intent (actor said he or she would come). Second, they result from the relationship between self and other (actor and friend), a relationship interpreted in terms of the intersubjective invariance of action orientations. These are based on the given regularities of established patterns of action (they always meet and play together). Third, expectations may refer to the nonnormative circumstances and the corresponding needs and feelings of the new child (new in town, alone). Therefore, a first differentiation between preference and preferability becomes possible. Preference relations are based on naive hedonistic criteria (which option pro-

vides more or less fun) and/or the quasi-obligatory aspects of the situation (actor does not want to leave out one or the other child). They take into account consequences of a decision for self and other. Consequences relate back to the self in terms of consequences and consequences of consequences (if actor does not go to friend, friend will never play with actor and then ...). The actor is construed as a person who knows about other's expectations towards him- or herself, and about negative evaluations that result from the violation of such expectations. Regularities in the context of friendship can be seen as precursors of rules and, therefore, of moral claims. Their quasi-obligatory nature is evidenced by the fact that action orientations violating expectations that result from such regularities are subject to criticism and in need of justification (friend will ask actor where he or she has been). Justifications as well as strategies of regulation make use of simple material compensations (actor will invite friend at another time) as well as of imperfect discourse strategies (actor hides action from friend). This strategy serves the function of avoiding negative consequences for the self.

Level 2. At this level a clear distinction between subjective-particular perspectives and intersubjectively *right* orientations of action is achieved. At the same time, both dimensions are differentiated and elaborated. Action is no longer oriented merely toward given regularities but also toward rules, i.e., toward normative expectations that self and other mutually accept as legitimate (actor has given a promise). Yet, these rules are still represented as isolated and abstract moral requirements. The differentiation between the descriptive and the prescriptive levels of social-cognitive reasoning — between *is* and *ought* — is presupposed by the ability to coordinate perspectives under a moral point of view — in a critical, self-reflective manner (actor knows that friend will think he or she is deceiving him). The distinction between given preference and preferability in a moral sense makes possible an interpretation of the situation as a conflict between desire and duty (wants to go to a movie but has promised). Understanding the inner world of others gains a moral dimension, but the conflict is not yet understood as an inner conflict of a moral self as is the case at the next level.

Preference behavior is now based, first, on formal rules, i.e., on "institutional facts" — such as having given a promise — and on the normative expectations based on these facts. It is based second on interpersonal rules, i.e., on the regularities of established action patterns that have achieved quasi-normative significance.Thus, the friendship relationship as such is taken to contain obligations that specify rules about how one should act towards a friend. Normative expectations are interpreted in abstract and general terms whose claims to validity are raised independently of the (concrete) persons, the circumstances, and the specifying context that potentially may restrict the validity claim of a norm (e.g., "a promise must be kept"). This type of interpretation presupposes a social-cognitive generalization in a dual form: temporal and social-interpersonal, implying that the rule is valid always and for everyone.

Relations are seen as more exclusive and intimate (being best friend). At the same time, when the situation is evaluated in view of appropriate action, particular conditions of the relationship are taken into account (friends have their special day, friend does not like new child). Formal rules and the consequences of their violation are interpreted on the background of such a specifying interpretation of the situation. Consequences can also be constructed with regard to their long-term effects for the ongoing relationship (they will stop being friends). In the case of violation of obligations actor is aware that other (friend) morally evaluates his or her actions and ascribes certain personality attributes to him or her (e.g., being somebody who will deceive or betray others).

Level 3. At this level the components of intersubjective rightness are further differentiated (preferability). Single rules and regularities are integrated into systems of norms of reciprocity basic to intimate relationships like friendship. The perspectives of self and other are tied to a role-bound understanding of how one generally acts and should act towards a friend. The norm of reciprocity and its derivatives such as dependability, reliability, and trustworthiness constitute the superordinate viewpoint that guides action in the context of an ongoing relationship. At the same time the moral point of view is elaborated. This leads to the view of an actor as bound by a strict obligation to conduct action under these norms (if she is a good friend she must go to her friend as promised, good friends must be able to trust each other). Obligations to the friend become part of an actor's self-evaluative system. Violating friendship norms would lead to a negative self-evaluation (he would feel guilty if he let his best friend down, he would feel that he was a traitor, that he is not a trustworthy friend). A strict ori-

entation towards these general norms also implies taking into account the particular circumstances of the friend's situation as well as that of the new child. Friend's situation-specific needs and problems become dominant factors that codetermine the structuring of action.

There is now a clear distinction between strategic and communicative action. This implies that illegitimate and legitimate strategies of regulation have become differentiated. A justification of an action that violates reciprocity norms is generally avoided. In the case of problematic actions that are subject to criticism, dialogue is used to attempt regulation: Actors engage in negotiation and communication in order to achieve consensual interpretation and mutual validation in the decision-making process and to define mutually accepted reasons for action. In case of violation of reciprocity norms, self attempts to elicit other's assent by appealing to excuses and justifications of self's motives, circumstances, and constraints (either the appeal of the offer made to the actor, or the situation of the new child). Thus, self tries to restore the moral balance in order to ascertain the long-term existence of the relationship.

Hypothetical role-taking or exchange serves the function of considering possible actions and reactions from the viewpoint of others (asking friend to take self's perspective or the perspective of the new child). This is the basis for the regulatory principle of universalization that leads to the potential exchange of the roles of actor, those concerned by an action, and those adjudicating, evaluating, as observers, the moral quality of an action.

Quantitative Results

The results of the empirical analyses of the longitudinal data reveal progression in the development of the categories of general socio-moral understanding. Figure 4.1 presents the data for the 7- to 15-year age span.(N = 92 subjects, 49 male and 43 female) for whom a complete data set is available.
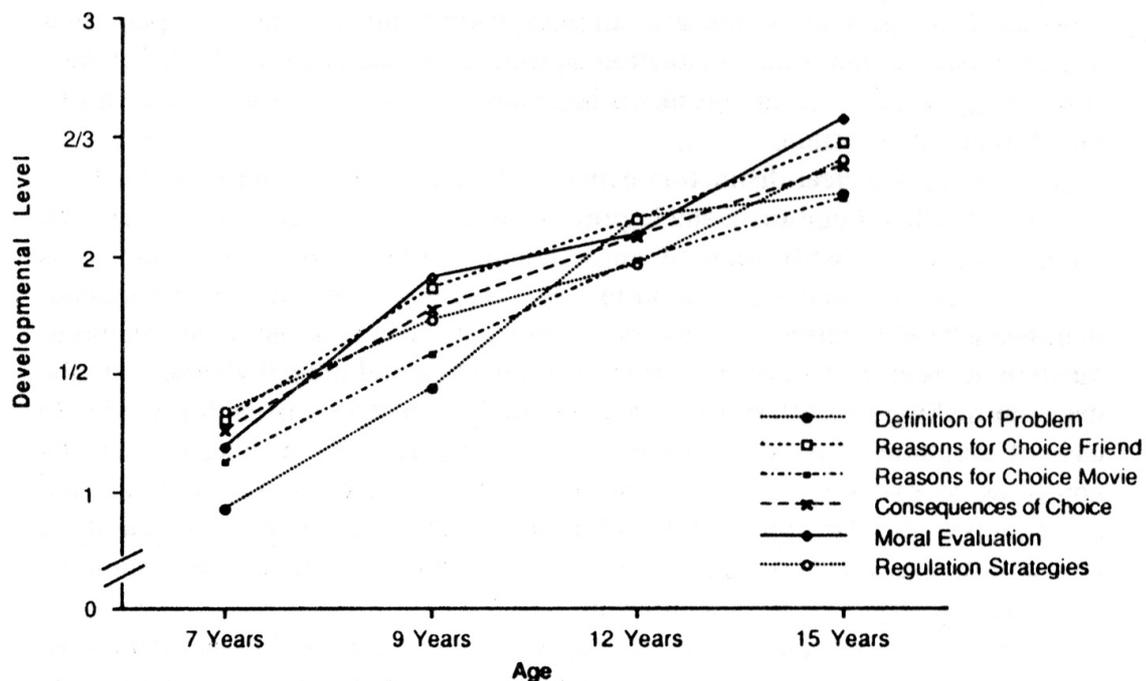

FIG. 4.1. Development of categories in reasoning about friendship-dilemma.

Developmental change proceeds in a regular fashion with progression rates of about one half of one stage on the average between two measurement occasions. Regression between adjacent measurement occasions varied be-

tween 2% and 10% for the various categories of socio-moral reasoning, mean regressions contribute about 4%. These numbers are within the conventional boundaries of the reliability of measurement. No sex effects were found in the developmental patterns. In sum, the longitudinal patterns show that the transformation of the categories of socio-moral meaning making is a regular, sequential and cumulative developmental process.

In general the results documents that the various content categories over time develop in a systematic and interconnected way. Yet, even in this relative homogeneous situation, context effects obtain als well. As Fig. 4.2 evidences it holds for all measurement occasions that reasoning about the motives for the action choice to go to the friend is developmentally advanced compared to reasoning about the motives for the action choice to go to the movie.
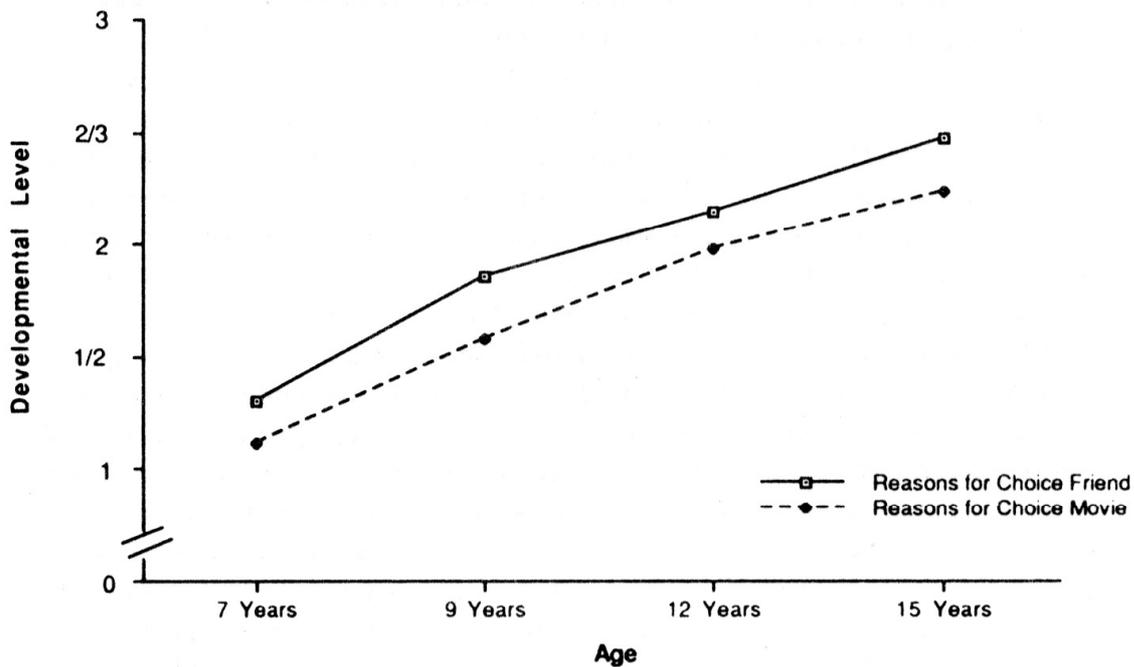

FIG. 4.2.   Context effects in reasoning about friendship-dilemma.

Further, the data show a highly significant association between level of socio-moral reasoning (represented by the summary score of the categories) and action choice (see Table 4.2). While the majority of subjects at level 1/2 and below choose to go to the movie with the new child, a majority of subjects at level 2 and most subjects at level 2/3 or 3 decide to go to the friend.

TABLE 4.2.
Level of Socio-Moral Reasoning and Action Choice

	≤ Level 1/2	Level 2	≤ Level 2/3	total
Movie	89	50	9	148
Friend	47	85	85	216
Total	135	135	94	364
Chi-square	74.100	$p \leq 0.001$		

Discussion

The analyses show that the development of socio-moral meaning making in friendship is part of the more encompassing development of the ability to understand persons, relations and actions. Understanding what it morally means to stand in a relationship develops in conjunction with the unfolding of the subject's naive theory of social action and responsibility. At the lowest level, the subject centers on one perspective and perceives other persons merely in terms of their hedonistic value for self's interests. At this level, action has not yet acquired psychological meaning in the sense of reconstructing and differentiating intentional action sequences. The subject is neither aware of reasons for action nor of consequences of action. It follows that a moral perspective that implies agency has not yet been established at this level.

At level 1 basic categories of the naive theory of action are established as evidenced by the representation of the psychological world of persons and their relations to each other. A conception of what is right is beginning to emerge. At this level children do not refer spontaneously to the promise given, neither in the context of descriptive reasoning about the motives or consequences of choices, nor in the context of prescriptive reasoning. Children appear to possess a concept of *quasi-obligations* based on the regularities of interactions and on the anticipation of the consequences that self's actions have for others or for the self. Regulatory strategies begin to appear when subjects become aware of the problematic aspects of the situation where friend's concerns are violated, but they remain deficient in terms of standards of discourse. In the context of prescriptive reasoning physical sanctions are not mentioned as moral reasons. Rather, sanctions play a role when consequences of violating a rule are anticipated. Yet, already at level 1, consequences are also interpreted psychologically (friend's anger). In contrast to Kohlberg (1976, 1984) and in agreement with Turiel (1983a, 1983b) our data also provide indications that, already at level 1, the validity of a moral rule such as promise-keeping is not supported by external sanctions like physical punishment. Punishment is not a cause of (reason for) abiding by the rule, but a mere consequence of violating the rule (see also Keller, Eckensberger & von Rosen, 1989).

At level 2 the construction of the conflict encompasses psychological details of persons' relationship with each other (regularities of interaction) as well as formal moral rules. Thus, preferences (what is the case) and preferability (what is right) can be clearly differentiated. In various segments of the naive theory of action there is evidence of increasing coordination of perspectives. Compared to the preceding level, the inner world of the other is interpreted at a deeper level of psychological understanding. In case of violation of the concerns of others, increased psychological understanding provides a sense that regulatory strategies are indeed necessary. A genuine concern with the relationship in terms of obligations and commitment to a friend emerges at this level. Grounded in the awareness of shared experience in an ongoing relationship, obligations and commitments are interpreted as rather specific behavioral requirements such as having to keep one's promises to the friend, or maintaining established routines of interaction. The reasons given for choices and moral evaluation may indicate genuine moral concern anchored in the nature of the relationship, as well as empathic concern and reciprocal sharing of feelings. The concrete reciprocity and instrumental exchange types of reasons invoked by Kohlberg as reasons for keeping a promise are absent from our data. Instead, at level 2 we find reasoning which, adopting a Kohlbergian perspective, one might tend to evaluate as stage 3 reasoning because of a concern for the good of the other and of the relationship (Keller et al., 1989).

At level 3 the child has mastered the double prerequisites of responsible action: (a) to understand that others have subjective and particular perspectives grounded in their specific circumstances and life conditions and, (b) simultaneously to take into account the intersubjective standards of rightness. Individuals are aware of basic norms of reciprocity and have established a moral self. Being a "good friend," in the sense of being loyal, trustworthy, and dependable is the superordinate viewpoint from which the categories of the naive theory of action are interpreted. Actions are evaluated in the light of what is fair and responsible towards a friend. Adolescents at this level tend to take a moral or prescriptive view when they think spontaneously about reasons for action and focus on the question how a good friend ought to act.

At level 3 criteria of moral precedence are established that determine why it is "more right" to join the friend than to accept the new child's invitation in spite of the acknowledged moral responsibility that actor has also incurred toward the new child. Interestingly, moral obligations and responsibilities toward the third child are also

most salient at this level which is characterized by a conception of intimacy and exclusiveness, tainted by feelings of jealousy toward the new child. This interpretation of level 3 is in basic agreement with Kohlberg's stage 3 of moral development. What is interesting and novel compared to what we know from Kohlberg's data is that moral obligations and duties based on the relationship come to be seen as negotiable under standards of discourse (Keller & Reuss, 1985, 1988). But in spite of the possibility of negotiation, action choices at this level are based on obligations and responsibilities towards the friend. The results show a systematic relationship between level of socio-moral reasoning and the hypothetical action choice in the conflict situation. Subjects at lower levels of reasoning frequently show a split between what they judge to be the right action choice (going to the friend) and what they actually choose (going to the movie). It is only at level 2/3 or 3 that the hypothetical action choice is consistently based on what is judged to be right. At this level a moral self is established that simultaneously defines the nature of the social relationships in which the subject engages: Commitments and obligations will then be experienced as binding to the person. It follows that action choice and moral judgment are consistent in situations where obligations are experienced as personally meaningful and binding.

To summarize, let us relate these findings to the three theoretical premises discussed in the beginning. The description of the developmental levels has highlighted the process of differentiation and coordination of the categories of the naive theory of social action and responsibility. Each level entails more encompassing coordinations that build on previous achievements and thus generate new and more comprehensive forms of descriptive and prescriptive meaning making. The analysis has produced rather general results, and more detailed analyses of the coordination processes are both desirable and possible (Eckensberger, 1984). However, even the present analysis grants insight into fundamental social-cognititive prerequisites of the interpretation of social relations.

In the description of the levels we focus on general features or "ideal types." Empirically, the subjects fit these ideal type descriptions to a greater or lesser extent by scoring at full or transitional levels. Individuals usually function at more than one level and thus are mostly encountered in the process of reconstructing current forms of meaning making and constructing new ones. Turning again to the question of distinct social knowledge systems discussed earlier, our data show that reasoning about an action conflict draws on selected aspects from all three domains distinguished earlier (persons, relations, and social structures). Therefore it appears reasonable to explain socio-moral meaning making as a process of differentiation and coordination of the categories of action.

In general the results presented here document that the various content categories of socio-moral resoning as assessed with the interview about the action-dilemma over time develop in a systematic and interconnected way. Yet, context effects of socio-moral reasoning were observed at well. Thus, in the dilemma presented the action choice to go to the friend — which is also perceived as the morally legitimae one — pulls for a higher level of socio-moral understanding. This result can also be interpreted in such a way that even among the oldest age group the level of reasoning of justification for an action choice which ist not perceived as fully morally legitimate is not at the same development level than reasoning about the morally legitimate alternative.

Context effects in socio-moral development become even stronger when reasoning is compared across domains or tasks (Keller, 1990). Thus, we could show that reasoning about the promise-keeping (e.g., why in general must a promise be kept) is developmentally advanced compared to reasoning about friendship (e.g., what makes friendship really close). This décalage again is observed across all age groups from age 7 to age 15 years. The same décalage holds true in the comparison of general reasoning about friendship and the situation-specific application of reasons referring to friendship in the action dilemma described above. In this case the reconstruction of friendship in the specific action context is developmentally advanced at all measurement occasions. We can conclude from these results that context is an important factor in the development of socio-moral meaning making. It is task for future research to develop a theory of socio-moral understanding that takes into account and specifies contexts of development in order to reconstruct the dynmanics of the development process.

We conclude with some hypotheses about the developmental dynamics of socio-moral development. We assume that the developmental transformations depend on, and result from, the experience of standing in relationships. The levels show how shared experience becomes represented at the symbolic level. This is true both for cognition and affect: Standing in a relationship implies ongoing negotiation of intentions, goals, and expec-

tations, as well as sharing experiences and feelings. It is through these processes that the child becomes aware of the other's inner world of subjective experience, gradually learns to anticipate the other person's reaction schemata, and finally comes to construct generalized expectations about behavior in relationships. Simultaneously, interactions extending over time in the context of shared experience constitute affective bonds which make other's reactions emotionally meaningful to the self. The anticipation of psychological reactions of emotionally significant others gives interpersonal meaning to moral rules that, in the early stage of interpersonal-moral meaning making, are perceived as merely abstract commands.

Another question that has not been adequately addressed concerns the issue of universal vs. person-specific aspects of socio-moral meaning making. Our emphasis has been on universal aspects of the organization of meaning making systems. Clearly, there are individual differences both in terms of intraindividual change (Edelstein, Keller & Schröder, 1990) and the (sub)culturally normative valence of particular aspects of the system of action. Moreover, specific ("idiosyncratic") performance conditions located in the psychological makeup of particular persons and/or their socialization experiences may generate valences, interaction modalities and rules of interpretation (such as defensive operations) specific to these person. The interface between universal and person-specific aspects of development, a question mostly unresearched to date may prove a fruitful field for the cooperation of developmental, personality and social psychologists.

Notes

[1]See Keller & Reuss (Human Development, 1984).

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