

Title	The Relations of High School Students' Prosocial Moral Reasoning, Expected Parental Reactions to Prosocial Behavior, Antisocial Behavior and their Prosocial and Antisocial Behaviors
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The Relations of High School Students' Prosocial Moral Reasoning, Expected Parental Reactions to Prosocial Behavior, Antisocial Behavior and their Prosocial and Antisocial Behaviors

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to examine relations among adolescents' expected parental reactions, prosocial moral reasoning, and prosocial and antisocial behavior. To assess prosocial and antisocial behavior for high school students, three sets of scales applicable to Myanmar culture context, namely, Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB), Expected Parental Reactions to Prosocial Behavior scale (ERPB) and Expected Parental Reactions to Antisocial Behavior scale (ERAB) were constructed. In this study, the sample group consisted of 292 high school students from Mandalay. Results predicted that expected parental reactions to antisocial behavior are related to lower levels of antisocial behaviors. Expected parental reactions to prosocial behaviors are related to higher levels of prosocial behavior. Regarding prosocial moral reasoning, significant relations were found with neither prosocial behaviors nor antisocial behaviors.

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the relations between adolescents' expectations of how their parents will react to prosocial and antisocial behaviors and adolescents' actual behaviors. Recent reports of dramatic incidents of violence and aggression by adolescents have resulted in a resurgence of interest in understanding the correlates of prosocial and antisocial behaviors, especially with regard to the impact parents may have on those behaviors.

Prosocial behavior includes "...actions that are intended to aid or benefit another person or group of people without the actor's anticipation of external rewards" (Mussen and Eisenberg, 1977: 3-4). In other words, just as children learn to be aggressive, that is, to hit, grab toys, call names, and embarrass others, they can also be helped to learn more positive, adaptive-prosocial-behavior. Thus, prosocial personality may include social responsibility, perspective taking, empathic concern, personal distress, mutual moral reasoning, other oriented moral reasoning and self reported altruism.

Antisocial behaviors are disruptive acts characterized by covert and overt hostility and intentional aggression toward others. Antisocial behaviors exist along a severity continuum and include repeated violations of social rules, defiance of authority and of the rights of others, deceitfulness, theft, and reckless disregard for self and others. Antisocial behavior can be identified in children as young as three or four years of age. We left unchecked these coercive behavior patterns will persist and escalate in severity over time, becoming a chronic behavioral disorder. This kind of behavior commonly includes skipping school, getting into fights, running away from home, persistently lying, using illegal drugs or alcohol, stealing, vandalizing property, engaging in aggressive or violent behavior towards other individuals, and violating school rules, home rules or local criminal laws.

From a parent's perspective, discipline means ensuring that a child receives consequences for a behavior in hopes that this will influence the likelihood of the child engaging that behavior in the future. Often, parents wish to decrease the likelihood of aversive behaviors and do so by showing their disapproval; when they wish to increase the likelihood of desirable behaviors, they reward those behaviors. Therefore, most studies of discipline have simply assessed the type of discipline used by parents and the level of prosocial and/or antisocial behavior of the children either concurrently or longitudinally.

According to social-cognitive theory, consequences influence antecedent behaviors by creating expectations that in the future, acting in similar ways will produce similar outcomes (Bandura, 1986). Even very young children behave as active agents and experience consequences for their actions. With the gradual accumulation of a repertoire of behaviors and consequences, individuals begin to formulate expected consequences for specific behaviors. An anticipated reward or punishment will increase or decrease the likelihood of a particular action; therefore, these expectations influence the decision-making process (Bandura, 1986). Indeed, research based on social-information - processing theories suggest that children and adolescents generate possible consequences of their antisocial (Crick & Dodge, 1994) and prosocial (Nelson & Crick, 1999) actions before selecting a behavioral response.

Parents issue many consequences for children's behavior. Over time, children and adolescents should naturally anticipate the reactions their parents might have to their future behaviors before choosing to engage in those behaviors. Based on Crick and Dodge's (1994) social information-processing model, children would not only generate those reactions but also evaluate them. Following their model, it would be expected that in most cases, children weigh the desirability of the expected parental reactions before acting. A few researchers have investigated parents' expressly stated behavioral expectations and have found these expectations to be associated with children's socially responsible and prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Children's perceptions of their parents' expectations, however, have received minimal attention. By the time children reach adolescence, they should have developed internalized expectancies about others' reactions to their own behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Furthermore, advanced in formal operational thinking including abstraction and forethought skills during adolescence might facilitate the application of those expectations to particular behavioral opportunities. Therefore, adolescents' perceptions of their parents' reactions to various behaviors should affect their choice of behaviors.

The influence of parenting on prosocial and antisocial behavior has been well documented, particularly research on parenting styles and parental disciplinary practices. Although positive child outcomes have been consistently associated with warm, responsive parenting and discipline strategies including parental inductions (Hoffman, 1983; Macoby & Martin, 1983), we still have much to learn about the processes underlying the impact of parenting on children's behavior. In fact, one key to effective discipline seems to be flexibility (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). That is, children and adolescents with more positive and fewer negative outcomes tend to have parents who use different discipline techniques for different transgressions and for children of different ages and temperament. In addition, children judge different types of discipline (e.g., withdrawal of privileges, physical punishment, love withdrawal, and induction) as more or less appropriate for different types of transgressions (e.g., hitting a peer versus not cleaning up a bedroom; Siegal & Barclay, 1985; Siegal & Cowen, 1984) and for different moral domains (Smetana, 1995).

Grusec and Goodnow (1994) proposed that whether particular parental interventions are perceived as acceptable or appropriate by children is a mediator between parental discipline methods and children's internalization of values. Their model provided a road map to explain the relations between discipline encounters and the extent to which children internalize their parents' values. The authors postulated that children must not only understand the message being conveyed by the disciplinary action but also accept the message before internalization can occur. One major factor affecting children's acceptance of the message is whether the children perceive the discipline method to be appropriate. Adolescents who expect their parents to respond appropriately to their prosocial or antisocial behaviors would be more likely to internalize those values than adolescents who expect their parents to respond inappropriately to those behaviors. Whether children consider parental intervention to be appropriate further depends on multiple variables, including the type of misdeed, the type of discipline, the degree of response, the manner in which the discipline is administered, the clarity and consistency of the message, the perceived significance to the parents, the degree of threat to the children's autonomy or security, individual characteristics of the parents and children, and perceived similarity of the parents' reasoning to the children's own reasoning about the situation (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

Based on Grusec and Goodnow's model, Wyatt and Carlo (2002) examined adolescents' expectations of whether parents would respond favorably or unfavorably to prosocial and antisocial behaviors and whether those expectations are associated with future prosocial and antisocial behaviors. They found that adolescents were more likely to behave prosocially and less likely to behave antisocially if they perceived their parents' reactions to prosocial behaviors to be appropriate, suggesting that adolescents hold different standards for parental reactions depending on the context in which their own (the adolescents') behavior occurs.

However, little research has focused on processes underlying the link between parenting and these behaviors in Myanmar. Expected parental reactions are central to Grusec and Goodnow's model. Therefore, based on Grusec and Goodnow's model, the following hypothesis were examined.

Hypothesis: 1 Adolescents who expected their parents would react appropriately to their prosocial behavior would be more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviors.

Hypothesis: 2 Adolescents who expected their parents would react appropriately to their antisocial behavior would be less likely to exhibit antisocial behaviors.

Another social cognition that has been linked to prosocial and antisocial behaviors is prosocial moral reasoning. Prosocial moral reasoning is defined as thinking about situations in which one's needs are in conflict with the needs of others in a context that is relatively free of formal rules, guidelines, or regulations (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning include internalized values consistent with benefiting others and society and with empathic motives. In contrast, lower levels of prosocial moral reasoning often refer to self-focused concerns and gaining other's approval. By adolescence, individuals are capable of expressing the range of prosocial moral reasoning types, and these types have been linked to social behaviors.

Conceptually, both prosocial moral reasoning and anticipating parental reactions require similar cognitive skills (e.g., abstraction, forethought, hypothetical-deductive thinking skills). Adolescents using more sophisticated prosocial moral reasoning and expecting more appropriate maternal and paternal reactions to behaviors, therefore, should be more likely to exhibit prosocial

behaviors and less likely to exhibit antisocial behaviors. If adolescents' judgments of the appropriateness of expected parental reactions are simply a function of how well they are able to reason about the particular moral behavior and consequences, we would expect prosocial moral reasoning to be the only significant predictor in the final stages of a hierarchical multiple regression. If, however, the appropriateness judgments are a separate construct, then expected parental reactions would be expected to significantly predict prosocial and antisocial behaviors, even after controlling statistically for a prosocial moral-reasoning level.

Therefore, the following hypothesis was also examined:

Hypothesis: 3 Adolescents using more sophisticated prosocial moral reasoning would be more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviors and less likely to exhibit antisocial behaviors.

Method

Participants

Participants were 292 high school students (mean age = 14.70 years, SD = 0.85) from No. 2 and No. 26 BEHS in Mandalay.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through two basic education high schools during spring semester. First, permission to approach participants to voluntarily take part in the study during class hours was obtained from the headmasters and class teachers. Then, we went into the classrooms and presented the study. Interested students asked to complete questionnaires. Approximate completion times for the questionnaires were 30 minutes. The response percentage was high, that is, 91%.

Measures

Assessment included measures of behaviors, emotions, and reasoning, as described as follows.

Behavioral measure. Information was obtained about adolescents' antisocial and prosocial behaviors from the adolescents. The overall score for each behavioral measure was computed as the sum of the ratings for each item in that scale. Therefore, higher scores on the measure indicate more of the specific type of behavior. Reports of antisocial behavior were obtained using a subscale of the Htun Than (2005) Personality Inventory. The antisocial scale is a 51-item scale designed to assess antisocial behaviors with a Yes/ No response format. Internal consistency coefficient of this scale was found to be .73. The validity coefficient was found to be .34. This value is a little bit low, but can be placed at an acceptable level. Prosocial behaviors were reported using 30 items from a scale developed by Penner (2002). Participants rated each item on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .66 and the validity coefficient was .78.

Expected parental reactions. A new scale, intended to assess how adolescents expect their parents to react to different behaviors, was created for this study. Each individual item described either an antisocial behavior (eight items) or prosocial behavior (seven items) in which adolescents might engage. Adolescents rated items as to how appropriately or inappropriately they anticipated their parents would react to those behaviors. Examples of the expected reactions

to antisocial behaviors included asking how they think their parents would react to their studying after school for starting a fight, lying about finishing their homework, blaming someone else for something they did wrong, and coming home late. The adolescent then marked on a 4-point scale from not at all to a great deal. Examples of the expected reactions to prosocial behaviors included asking how they think their parents would react to their joining a volunteer organization, asking their parents to help raise money for a school club, lending someone money for lunch, and helping a neighbor around the house. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the expected reaction to antisocial scale was .44 and for the expected reactions to prosocial scale was .69.

Prosocial moral reasoning. Adolescents completed the preference measure of prosocial moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969). Participants were presented with two story dilemmas in which the needs of the protagonist are in conflict with the needs of the victim. For example, one story involves a decision for the protagonist either to steal the drug for his wife or do not steal the drug his wife. Another story involves a decision for the protagonist either to say her mother for lying or do not say her mother for lying. After reading each of two story dilemmas, adolescents indicated whether the protagonist should steal or lie. Then, their responses were scored by using the six stages of the Kohlberg's theory.

Results and Discussion

Results

Means, standard deviation and full correlation matrix for the variables are presented in Table 1. Within the correlation matrix, several relations should be highlighted. There were significant positive correlations between the expected reactions to prosocial and antisocial behaviors. That is, the more appropriately adolescents expected parents to react to antisocial behaviors, the more appropriately did the adolescents also expect parents to react to prosocial behaviors. This suggests that adolescents perceived a certain degree of consistency in reactions to different types of behaviors from their parents.

The expectation measures had significant correlations with some of the behavioral measures (antisocial and prosocial behaviors). As it was expected that there would be some degree of collinearity among the expectation measures, hierarchical multiple regressions on each of the behavioral measures were the most appropriate analyses to examine for unique effects of expectation measures.

A total of 2 regression analyses were conducted, for each of the 2 types of behaviors, adolescents behavioral report was regressed on expected parental reactions. To control statistically for variability in the outcome measures attributable to age, this variable was entered into each regression.

Expected parental reactions to antisocial and prosocial behaviors were the primary variables of interests, therefore, these were entered first in each regression. In choosing which of these two measures to enter first, previous literature on parenting was consulted. Parents respond more often to antisocial behaviors than to prosocial behaviors. Therefore, the measure more likely to show an effect (expected parental reactions to antisocial behaviors) was entered first

Table1 Descriptive and Correlations Among Antisocial Behaviors, Prosocial Behaviors, Prosocial Moral Reasoning, and Expected Parental Reactions to Antisocial and Prosocial Behaviors

	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
1. Prosocial	–						86.75	10.50
2. Exppro	.25**	–					19.78	3.47
3. Expanti	.05	.14*	–				27.41	3.40
4. Antisocial	-.02	-.01	-.13*	–			22.76	6.22
5. PROM	.07	-.07	-.05	-.02	–		2.12	0.37
6. Age	-.10	-.08	-.14*	.06	.04	–	14.64	1.17

Note: Expanti = Expected Parental Reactions to Antisocial Behaviors, Exppro = Expected Parental Reaction to Prosocial Behaviors, PROM = Prosocial Moral Reasoning

*P < .05, **P < .01

(along with age); the measure for which the literature was unclear (expected reactions to prosocial behaviors) was entered second. As a final step, the composite score from the PROM was entered to see if the expected parental reactions maintained predictive utility above and beyond the effects of prosocial moral reasoning. Full models (see Table 2), therefore, included four predictors (age, expected reactions to antisocial behavior, expected reactions to prosocial behavior, and prosocial moral reasoning).

Relations Between Expected Reactions to Antisocial Behaviors and Adolescent Behaviors

As can be seen in Table 2, expected parental reactions to antisocial behaviors were related negatively to adolescents' reports of antisocial behaviors. That is, the more appropriately adolescents expected their parents to react to antisocial behaviors, the less likely they were to report antisocial behaviors. Expected reactions to antisocial behaviors were not significantly related to adolescent reports of prosocial behavior.

Relations Between Expected Reactions to Prosocial Behaviors and Adolescent Behaviors

In four of the models, these expectations significantly and strongly predicted prosocial behaviors even when all other variables of interest were included. Specifically, adolescents' reports of prosocial behavior were higher for adolescents who expected their parents to react more appropriately to prosocial behaviors. This was true even when statistically controlling for proaocial moral reasoning levels. In contrast, as can be seen in Table 2, expected reactions to prosocial behaviors were not significantly related to adolescents' reports of antisocial behaviors.

Relations Between Prosocial Moral Reasoning and Adolescent Behaviors

As the PROM was entered in the last step in each regression, the test of whether the PROM had unique predictive power was more conservative than for the expected parental reaction variables. However, our result shown that prosocial moral reasoning was not significantly associated with adolescent reports of prosocial behaviors. Furthermore, there were

Table 2 Standardized Regression coefficients of Expected Parental Reactions to Antisocial Behaviors, Expected Parental Reactions to Prosocial Behaviors and Prosocial Moral Reasoning Predicting Adolescent's Reports of Antisocial and Prosocial Behaviors

Predictors	Antisocial Behaviors		Prosocial Behaviors	
	R ²	β	R ²	β
Step 1	.02		.01	
Age		.04		-.09
Expected reaction to antisocial behaviors		-.13*		.04
Step 2	.02		.06***	
Age		.04		-.07
Expected reactions to antisocial behaviors		-.13*		.01
Expected reactions to prosocial behaviors		.02		.23***
Step 3	.02		.07	
Age		.04		-.08
Expected reactions to antisocial behaviors		-.13*		.01
Expected reactions to prosocial behaviors		.02		.23***
Prosocial moral reasoning		-.02		.08

Note: The significance levels associated with each R² denote the significance level of R² change for that step.

*P < .05, **P < .01, ***P < .001

no significant relations between adolescents' reports of antisocial behavior and prosocial moral reasoning.

Discussion

In general, adolescent prosocial behaviors, and antisocial behaviors, as reported by adolescents, were predicted by adolescents' expected parental reactions to those behaviors. These findings lend support to Grusec and Goodnow's (1994) model that expectations regarding parental reactions are important correlates of prosocial and antisocial behaviors. The findings are consistent with the thesis that parents exert their influence by fostering expectations in their adolescents. These expectations, in turn, might mitigate or enhance prosocial or antisocial behaviors. Although this study design did not allow for a direct test of this causal model, the study did yield evidence that adolescents' expected parental reactions are associated with prosocial and antisocial behaviors.

As predicted, adolescents expecting more appropriate parental reactions to prosocial behaviors were reported to engage in more prosocial behaviors. These findings suggest there are individual differences in adolescents' perceptions of their parents' responses to prosocial behaviors. Given that most parents consider prosocial behaviors to be desirable behaviors, perhaps it is somewhat surprising to find individual differences in expected reactions to prosocial behaviors. Clearly, parents promote different expectations regarding their adolescents' involvement in prosocial behaviors. Indeed, researchers have pointed out that parents do not always respond to their children's prosocial behaviors, and even when they do, they might do so inconsistently (Grusec, 1991). Over time, these inconsistent reactions might lead to unclear or vague messages regarding parents' desire for their adolescents to engage in prosocial behaviors. Notably, the pattern for these findings remained significant even after statistically controlling for

prosocial moral reasoning. Thus, the findings were unlikely caused by individual differences in moral reasoning skills.

Prior research also suggests that parents are less likely to be consistently reinforcing prosocial behaviors or failure to act prosocially (Grusec, 1991), especially in distressed families (Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989) but also in nondistressed families. The reactions children are inconsistently receiving may be more important than previously supposed, an idea that is supported by learning and social-cognitive theories of intermittent reinforcement that an unpredictable reinforcement schedule tends to produce more of the behavior rather than less (Bandura, 1986). Furthermore, if adolescents are not reinforced for prosocial behaviors as consistently as they are for antisocial behaviors, then parents' reactions to prosocial behaviors may be more salient and meaningful to adolescents than are constant reactions to transgressions, as these might result in desensitization to those reactions. Analogously, one might expect that an inconsistent pattern of punishments or withdrawal of reinforcers for transgressions might lead to adolescents' expected parental reactions that increase the likelihood of future transgressions. These patterns of inconsistency might help to explain why adolescents appear to sometimes "tune out" their parents' reactions.

Our findings suggest that expected parental reactions to antisocial behaviors were a somewhat less strong predictor than were expected parental reactions to prosocial behaviors. One might theorize that adolescents internalize strong expectations regarding antisocial behaviors and that these expectations would have more impact on future behaviors than would expectations regarding prosocial behaviors. More research will be needed to confirm these findings.

One possibility is that the expectation measures are markers of parenting style measures as described in the prior literature on parenting. Authoritative parents are those who are more consistent with discipline and more likely to explain discipline choices to their children (Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Because it has been argued (Lewis, 1981) that the most important variable discriminating parenting styles is communication about rules and expectations, adolescents of authoritative parents should be more likely to understand the reasons behind their parents' reactions and should therefore report those expected reactions as more appropriate. Indeed, the use of inductive discipline (explaining why a transgression was wrong and highlighting the negative consequences to others) has consistently been associated with both authoritative parenting and with positive outcomes for children and adolescents (Baumrind, 1991, Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). One should note, however, that in this study, the pattern of relations for expected parental reaction measures was somewhat different depending on whether parents were reacting to prosocial or antisocial behaviors. In addition, expected parental reactions to prosocial behaviors were a relatively stronger predictor than were expected parental reactions to antisocial behaviors. These patterns of relations suggest that it is unlikely that the expected parental reaction measures are directly tapping into general parenting style.

Inconsistent with cognitive developmental theory, prosocial moral reasoning was not related significantly to prosocial and antisocial behavior. Higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning were not significantly related to prosocial behaviors and not significantly related to antisocial behaviors. It is possible that the data are not significant as Kohlberg's dilemmas do not directly measure prosocial moral reasoning. The results could be good if Eisenberg's dilemmas are used as they directly measure prosocial moral reasoning. It is recommended that well-fit test be used in the later research.

In general, the pattern of findings showed that expected parental reactions to prosocial behaviors were a relatively stronger predictor than were expected parental reactions to antisocial behaviors. Some scholars have emphasized conflict and transgression contexts (eg. discipline contexts) as strong influences of moral development. These contexts had been considered strong socialization context because there are often strong emotional reactions by caregivers to these behaviors. However, parental approval and support can be equally strong, emotionally evocative contexts for socializing children on what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior. These findings suggest that there is a need to examine positive behavior contexts as influential sources of behavioral development. Research on the interplay of socialization practices in prosocial and antisocial behavior contexts may best predict developmental outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations to this study should be addressed. Consistent with Grusec and Goodnow's (1994) conceptualization, a subjective measure of the appropriateness of expected parents' reactions was chosen for this study. Appropriateness in this context was construed as reflecting an adolescent's degree of acceptance of their parents' response to prosocial and antisocial behaviors. Following the model's predictions, adolescents who view their parents' expected responses to these behaviors as appropriate are likely to internalize their parents' values, whereas adolescents who view their parents' responses as inappropriate are less likely to internalize their parents' values. Although this allowed adolescents to make their own judgment of what "appropriate" means in a given situation, it did not allow for an analysis of what constituted their definition of appropriate. Future research could be conducted to examine adolescents' meaning of appropriate parental reactions. Moreover, this study used a volunteer sample that was homogenous with regards to demographic variables and did not exhibit extremely varying levels of prosocial and antisocial behaviors. The pattern of significant relations of the expectation measures within this moderate sample size, however, suggests that a larger sample with more variability in prosocial and antisocial behaviors might increase the predictive power of the models. Furthermore, future researchers could examine whether the hypothesized direction of causality might be reversed using longitudinal data. For example, adolescents who engage in higher levels of antisocial behavior might label any form of parental intervention as inappropriate or adolescents who engage in high levels of prosocial behavior might label any form of parental intervention as appropriate. If so, then behaviors might cause adolescents' expectations of their parents to change over time. Finally, although the present findings provide support for one important aspect of Grusec and Goodnow's model, other components of Grusec and Goodnow's model needed to be examined in future studies.

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