

The Development of Respect in Children and Adolescents

Tina Malti, Joanna Peplak & Linlin Zhang



Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development
Lynn S. Liben, Editor

VOL. 85 | NO. 3 | 2020 | SERIAL NO. 338

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Society for Research in Child Development

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Inquiries may be addressed to the Editor:

Lynn S. Liben
Department of Psychology
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
liben@psu.edu

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Tina Malti

University of Toronto, University of Toronto Mississauga

Joanna Peplak

University of Toronto, University of Toronto Mississauga

Linlin Zhang

Capital Normal University Beijing

Lynn S. Liben
Series Editor

Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development

Vol. 85, No. 3, 2020, Serial No. 338

Editor

Lynn S. Liben

The Pennsylvania State University

Publications Manager

Rachel Walther

Society for Research in Child Development

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The Development of Respect in Children and Adolescents

Tina Malti,^{1,2} Joanna Peplak,^{1,2} and Linlin Zhang³

Abstract Respect is an integral part of everyday life. It is a virtue central to the aim of living an ethically good life. Despite its importance, little is known about its emergence, development, correlates, and consequences. In this monograph, we aim to fill this gap by presenting empirical work on children's and adolescents' thinking and feelings about respect. Specifically, we examined the development of respect in ethnically diverse samples of children between the ages of 5 and 15 years ($N = 476$). Using a narrative and semi-structured interview, as well as self-, caregiver- and teacher-reports, and peer-nominations, we collected information on children's respect conceptions and reasoning, as well as on the social-emotional correlates and prosocial and aggressive behavioral outcomes of respect.

We begin with a review of theoretical accounts on respect. This includes a selective overview of the history of respect in philosophy and psychology in Chapter I. Here, we discuss early writings and conceptualizations of respect across the seminal works of Kant and others. We then provide an account of the various ways in which respect is conceptualized across the psychological literature. In Chapter II, we review extant developmental theory and research on respect and its development, correlates, and behavioral consequences. In this chapter, as part of our developmental framework, we discuss how respect is related and distinct from other emotions such as sympathy and admiration.

Next, we describe our methodology (Chapter III). This includes a summary of our research aims, samples, and measures used for exploring this novel area of research. Our primary goals were to examine how children and adolescents conceptualize respect, how their conceptualizations differ by age, whether and to what degree children feel respect toward others' "good"

¹Department of Psychology, University of Toronto, ²Centre for Child Development, Mental Health, and Policy, University of Toronto Mississauga, ³School of Psychology, Capital Normal University Beijing.

Corresponding author: Tina Malti, Centre for Child Development, Mental Health, and Policy, University of Toronto Mississauga, 3359 Mississauga Road North, Mississauga, ON L5L 1C6, Canada, email: tina.malti@utoronto.ca

Citation Information: Malti, T., Peplak, J., & Zhang, L. (2020). The Development of Respect in Children and Adolescents. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 85(3). DOI: 10.1111/mono.12417

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behavior (i.e., respect evaluations for behavior rooted in ethical norms of kindness, fairness, and personal achievement goals), and how children's respect is related to other ethical emotions and behaviors.

The next three chapters provide a summary of our empirical findings. Chapter IV showcases our prominent results on the development of children's conceptions of respect. Results revealed that children, across age, considered prosociality to be the most important component involved in conceptualizations of respect. We also found age-related increases in children's beliefs about fairness as a core component of respect. Children and adolescents also reported feeling higher levels of respect for behavior in the ethical domain (e.g., sharing fairly and inclusion) than behavior in the personal domain (i.e., achieving high grades in school). Chapter V investigates how sympathy and feelings of sadness over wrongdoing relate to respect conceptions and respect for behavior. Our findings show that sadness over wrongdoing was positively associated with adolescents' fairness conceptions of respect. Sympathy was positively related to children's feelings of respect toward others' ethical behavior. In Chapter VI, we present links between respect and social behavior. Our findings provide some evidence that children's feelings of respect are positively linked with prosocial behavior and children's conceptions of respect (particularly those reflecting themes of fairness and equality) are negatively related to physical aggression.

In the last two chapters, we discuss the empirical findings and their implications for practice and policy. In Chapter VII, we draw upon recent work in the field of social-emotional development to interpret our results and provide insight into how our findings extend previous seminal work on the development of respect from early childhood to adolescence. Finally, in Chapter VIII, we conclude by discussing implications for educational and clinical practice with children and adolescents, as well as social policies aimed at reducing discrimination and nurturing children's well-being and positive peer relationships.

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Postmaster: Send all address changes to MONOGRAPHS OF THE SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT, Wiley Periodicals LLC, C/O The Sheridan Press, PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331.

THE MONOGRAPHS OF THE SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT, (ISSN 0037-976X (print), ISSN 1540-5834 (online)) is published quarterly, on behalf of The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc., by Wiley Periodicals LLC, 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774.

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Printed in the USA by The Sheridan Group

ISSN 0037-976X (Print)

ISSN 1540-5834 (Online)

The Development of Respect in Children and Adolescents

Respect is paradoxical: its use vastly exceeds what is known about its origin and development. In this monograph, Tina Malti, Joanna Peplak, and Linlin Zhang explore children's and adolescents' thinking and feelings about respect. Using a novel mixed-method approach, the authors investigate how children and adolescents, ages 5, 7, 11, and 15 years, make meaning of and express respect toward others. Contrary to prominent developmental theories on respect, the findings reveal that respect across ages is predominantly viewed as a kindness virtue and thus ethical in nature. It becomes enmeshed in fairness concerns during adolescence. Together, respect is rooted in kindness and fairness, which may have implications for efforts aimed at nurturing well-being and relationships across childhood and adolescence.