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The Influence of Group Stereotypes on Adolescents' Moral Reasoning

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The purpose for this study was to investigate adolescents' judgments about the appropriate punishment of other adolescents for accused transgressions in situations where stereotype information was present or absent. Ninety-two male and 85 female, predominantly European-American, ninth-grade adolescents made judgments about the appropriateness of punishing members of social reference groups for accused transgressions about which there was no clear evidence that the students from the group actually committed the transgressions. In two of the four conditions the accused transgressions were consistent with group stereotypes whereas in the other two conditions the accused transgressions were inconsistent with group stereotypes. The majority of adolescents judged the act of punishing a group without proper evidence as wrong and used moral reasons to justify those decisions.

Stereotypes are expectations about the characteristics of social groups (Fiske, 1998; Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1994; Macrae, Stangor, & Hewstone, 1996). Although stereotypes frequently are viewed as expectations about the traits believed to be true of group members (e.g., boys are aggressive, girls are passive), they also might refer to expectations about the normative behavior or activities for a group (e.g., boys like to play baseball, girls like to do ballet) (see Liben & Signorella, 1993). Although much is known about the ways in which stereotypes influence social information processing such as attention

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to, and memory for, information (Bigler & Liben, 1993; Fyock & Stangor, 1994; Stangor & McMillan, 1992; Stangor & Ruble, 1989a, 1989b), less is known about how and when individuals use stereotypes as a source of information to make decisions about appropriate or inappropriate social behaviors. This lack of knowledge is particularly acute in regard to adolescents because the research in this domain has been conducted either with adults (Bodenhausen, 1990; Bodenhausen & Lichtenstein, 1987; Bodenhausen & Wyer, 1985; Rector & Bagby, 1997; Ugwuengbu, 1979; Willis, 1992) or with young children (Mackie, Hamilton, Susskind, & Rosselli, 1996; Theimer, Killen, & Stangor, 1998). The goal for the present research was to investigate whether adolescents' judgments about the appropriate punishment of other adolescents for accused transgressions were associated with the presence of information consistent with the stereotypical expectations of group behavior.

Within the adult literature, there is some evidence that stereotypes can influence the punishments given to individuals for alleged transgression (Bodenhausen, 1988, 1990; Bodenhausen & Lichtenstein, 1987; Bodenhausen & Wyer, 1985; Rector & Bagby, 1997; Ugwuengbu, 1979; Willis, 1992). In a study of juror decision-making about the guilt of a defendant in a rape trial, Willis found that participants who held racial stereotypes were more likely to judge that a rape occurred if the man was Black than if he was White. In a similar study, Ugwuengbu found that when there was only marginal evidence of the actual guilt of the accused person, Black and White participants both rated an opposite race defendant as more guilty of the crime than a same race defendant. Additionally, in a study of hindsight bias in perceptions of court cases, Bodenhausen found that participants were more likely to perceive stereotyped defendants as guilty of a crime regardless of outcome information presented to the participants, whereas that was not the case for non-stereotyped defendants.

Although those findings indicate that stereotypes can affect important social decisions such as punishments of accused individuals, they do not provide a clear explanation for the ways in which they do so. The social-cognitive domain model (Turiel, 1983, 1998), however, can be used to provide such an explanation. In that theory it is proposed that social judgments can be affected by the reasoning processes that are brought to bear on the judgments. Specifically, the social-cognitive domain model is based on the proposition that there are three conceptually distinct domains of social reasoning—moral, societal, and psychological—and numerous studies have provided evidence that children, adolescents, and adults typically make distinctions among these three domains when reasoning about social events (for a review see Smetana, 1995a; Tisak, 1995; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987). The *moral* domain refers to fairness, others' welfare, and rights. The *societal*

domain pertains to norms and expectations that make groups function smoothly; and the *psychological* domain refers to the self (e.g., personal decision-making, self concept). Furthermore, conceptually differing types of principles influence judgments and reasoning within each of the domains (for a review see Smetana, 1995a; Tisak, 1995; Turiel et al., 1987). As an illustration, when asked to make a judgment about a straightforward moral situation such as inflicting harm on someone, not only do individuals judge this as wrong, but also they justify their judgments by appealing to moral issues involving the welfare of others (Smetana, 1995a). However, when asked to evaluate a straightforward social-conventional transgression, such as violating a rule about dress codes, individuals judge this as wrong on the basis of societal rules and expectations (see Tisak, 1995).

Which of the three domains of reasoning prevails in determining the outcome of complex judgments is determined, in part, by which domain currently is most salient—that is, which domain is given priority—to the individual (Helwig, 1995; Wainryb, 1991). For example, in a study in which beliefs about the disciplinary effectiveness of spanking were investigated (Wainryb, 1991), individuals for whom the moral features of the situation (causing harm to the child) were most salient judged spanking as wrong and ineffective; whereas individuals for whom the social-conventional features of parental authority and control were most salient judged spanking as all right and effective.

The current investigation was designed to determine the relation between adolescent group stereotypes and adolescent social reasoning about situations involving moral (fairness) and social-conventional (group stereotypes) considerations. Based on previous research within the domain model, it was hypothesized that when a behavior under consideration is stereotypical for a group, then the salience of social-conventional considerations would be increased, relative to moral considerations. Previous studies have shown that children's reasoning about gender stereotypes reflects social-conventional reasoning (Carter & Patterson, 1982; Stoddart & Turiel, 1985). When Carter and Patterson (1982) interviewed children about gender role expectations, they found that children reasoned about those expectations using the same criteria that were applied to other social conventions (e.g., that the norms are changeable, alterable, and context-specific). In general, social-conventional reasoning involves making judgments about how to ensure the smooth functioning of a social group (Turiel, 1983). Those judgments can include justifications about the jurisdictions of persons in authority and the form of consensus made by the group to regulate its social interactions (Turiel, 1983), as well as expectations about individuals that are identified with a group (Carter & Patterson, 1982). It is the latter type of justifications that are proposed to be

most similar to stereotypic judgments (Killen & Stangor, 1998) because stereotypes are generalized attributions applied indiscriminately to all members of a group (as noted previously, this can be in the form of traits or activities).

In the present study, scenarios were developed in which a school group is being blamed for an act of vandalism, even though no clear evidence is available regarding the groups' responsibility. In these contexts, it was expected that the most salient information would be the lack of evidence regarding who committed the transgressions. As a result, moral reasoning would prevail, and any punishment would be seen as unwarranted. However, in cases in which the accused transgression is stereotypically expected of the group, the presence of the expectation should result in an increase in the use of social-conventional reasoning. When stereotypes are present, adolescents might be more likely to reason about the event in social-conventional terms, including expectations about social group behavior (e.g., stereotypes) as well as beliefs about the maintenance of school order, adherence to rules about vandalism and retribution, and references to authority mandates. Thus, it was hypothesized that for stereotype consistent transgressions the likelihood of adolescents' use of social-conventional reasoning would increase and that retribution for the transgression correspondingly would be more likely to be seen as warranted. It was expected also that transgressions not viewed as stereotype consistent would be evaluated as wrong and that adolescents would justify their evaluations using moral principles.

A sample of adolescents was chosen to test these hypotheses for several reasons. First, although there is an abundance of literature concerning the influence of stereotypes in preschool and elementary school children (Aboud, 1988, 1992; Bigler & Liben, 1993; Carter & Patterson, 1982; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Liben & Signorella, 1993), as well as adults (see Fiske, 1998; Leyens et al., 1994; Macrae et al., 1996), little is known about the influence of stereotypes in adolescence. Adolescents are able to perceive and reason about a situation from multiple perspectives, as well as take into account the different dimensions of a social situation (Barenboim, 1981; Selman, 1980). Thus, moral reasoning of adolescents should be well developed and should have an influence on decisions about complex social events. At the same time, however, because adolescents have an increased understanding of the social hierarchy and structures within the school and patterns of association within that structure (Adler & Adler, 1995; Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994; Eckert, 1989; Youniss, McLellan, & Strouse, 1994), they also might be more likely to bring their knowledge of differing social groups to bear on their judgments. Stereotypes about social reference groups are highly prevalent during adolescence (Brown, 1989; Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986; Brown et al.,

1994; Youniss et al., 1994), and adolescents are known to be influenced greatly by social beliefs (Koslowski & Okagaki, 1986; Moshman & Franks, 1986). Thus, perceptions of stereotypes about adolescent reference groups might be expected to be closely associated with the social judgments for these individuals.

Additionally, although research on adolescent reference groups has indicated that stereotypes about these social reference groups are based primarily on shared activities as well as on types of dress, appearance, behaviors, attitudes, and values (Brown et al., 1994), most of the research in the area of social reference groups has used ethnographic methods and primarily has been descriptive in nature. For example, students who are recognized to be active in athletics and referred to as "jocks," often are described as being loud and rowdy, whereas students who are known to spend a good deal of time with computers and referred to as "techies," often are described as wearing pocket protectors and having greasy hair (Youniss et al., 1994). Little is known, however, about how such perceptions of adolescent reference groups might be related to social and moral judgments.

Finally, using social reference groups (peer groups such as jocks and techies) rather than other types of social categories such as those based on gender or ethnicity as stimuli also is methodologically advantageous. Reference groups appear to be accepted by adolescents as a natural part of the structure of the adolescent social world (Brown, 1990; Brown et al., 1994; Dunphy, 1963; Eckert, 1989; Youniss et al., 1994). As such, they are likely to be less politicized than other social categories such as race and gender and, as a result, adolescents might be more willing to use beliefs about those groups than they would beliefs about other social categories.

To test the hypotheses, ninth grade students were given one of four scenarios to evaluate. Those scenarios consisted of two social groups (football players and computer club members) and two acts of vandalism at school (damaging sound equipment at a party or breaking into the computer system) in which a school group was blamed for the act by the student council president even though there was no clear evidence about who committed the vandalism. In two conditions the vandalism was consistent with the stereotype of the group (e.g., jocks damaging sound equipment at a party or techies breaking into the computer system), and in two conditions the vandalism was inconsistent with the stereotype of the group (e.g., techies damaging sound equipment at a party or jocks breaking into the computer system). Participants were asked to judge whether asking the group to pay for the damage done was all right or not all right and to evaluate this act in terms of its severity (how bad?) and in terms of the amount of authority the student council had (how justified?), as well as to provide a justification for their responses (why or why not?).

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 92 male and 85 female ninth grade students ($M = 15.1$ years, $SD = .72$) at a high school located in a small Midwestern city. The sample primarily was European American (91%), but there were 7 African American, 1 Asian American, 4 Hispanic, and 4 Native American students. The participants primarily were from middle-class backgrounds as assessed by school officials. Parent permission letters were distributed by the teachers to all of the students in ninth-grade American history classes. Only those students who received parent permission participated in the study (70% return rate). The demographic distribution of the sample matched that of the school's population, which was 91% European American.

Procedure

The research was a 2×2 design in which members of one of two school groups (football players or computer club members) were accused of having engaged in one of the two transgressions (coming to the school dance drunk and breaking some expensive sound equipment or breaking into a school Internet and e-mail system and damaging some expensive software). Despite the fact that there was no evidence to link either group to the crime, the members of the group (either the football team or the computer club members) were punished for allegedly having committed the transgression. This design created two vignettes (football players breaking sound equipment and computer club members damaging computer software) in which the behavior was consistent with the stereotype of the reference group and two vignettes (football players damaging computer software and computer club members breaking sound equipment) in which the behavior was inconsistent with the stereotype.

During their American history class, each participant completed a questionnaire containing one of the four vignettes. Instructions about responding to the questionnaire were given both orally and in writing. The students were told that the researcher was interested in what ninth graders think about school groups and that they would be completing some questions about things that might happen to students. Students were asked to pay attention to their own work, that there were no right or wrong answers, that their own opinions were of interest to the researchers, and that the responses would be completely anonymous. When the students completed the questionnaires,

they placed them in a folder at the front of the class and any questions they had regarding the study were answered.

Data on participants' birth date, gender, ethnicity, and participation in school activities were first collected on a cover page and the second page contained the vignette. For instance, in the computer club stereotype inconsistent transgression the vignette read as follows:

At the Friday night school dance sponsored by the student council, some students had too much to drink and were horsing around. As a result, some of the student council's expensive stereo and sound equipment got damaged. The next week the student council president wrote a letter to the computer club members requiring that they pay for the damages to the equipment.

Each adolescent was asked to respond to five questions after reading the vignette. First, they indicated whether they thought the student council president's decision was all right or not all right (evaluation). Second, the students wrote a short sentence explaining why they made their evaluation (justification). Students were then asked to indicate how bad they thought the student council president's actions were (severity), and then to indicate how justified the president's behavior was (justified). Finally, as a check that the stereotypes indeed had been activated, the students indicated how likely they thought it was that the group actually had performed the behavior (likelihood). Each of these last three ratings were made on seven-point scales (1 = *a little bit bad, completely justified, or not likely at all*; 7 = *very, very bad, completely unjustified, or very likely*).

On the last page of the questionnaire, students were given a measure of stereotype knowledge to assure that they were familiar with the stereotypes. The knowledge assessment consisted of a listing of eight statements, such as "get good grades," "come to school dance drunk," and "break into school computer system," along with the names of the two school groups used in the research (computer club members and football team members). Students were asked to circle the group that was most likely to perform each of the behaviors. If students circled football players for "come to the school dance drunk," or computer club members for "break into the school computer system" this was coded as knowing the stereotype for that group.

Coding of Justification Data

Five categories derived from previous work (Killen & Stangor, 1998; Killen & Turiel, 1998; Smetana, 1995a; Tisak, 1995; Turiel, 1983) and pilot data were developed to code the adolescents' justifications. Each

participant's response was assigned to only one justification category. Justifications were coded as: 1 = moral (fairness and rights) (e.g., "they have no proof that the football players broke the equipment"), 2 = social-conventional (school rules or norms, order, authority, and group responsibility) (e.g., "the student council needs to take care of the equipment so they can continue to have dances" and "the student council should decide because they are in charge"), 3 = personal (individuals' choice to do what he or she wants) (e.g., "anybody can do anything they want to"), 4 = missing (no data), or 5 = undifferentiated (unreadable, incomplete). Personal, missing, and undifferentiated categories combined accounted for less than 5% of the responses and were dropped from subsequent analysis. The coding of the justifications was conducted by a single rater who was blind both to group and condition. A second rater coded 25% of the surveys. Interrater reliability, computed on the basis of the original five justifications, was 86% (Cohen's kappa = .77).

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses were conducted to confirm that the adolescents were aware of the appropriate stereotypes portrayed in the vignettes by analyzing the stereotype knowledge measure that was completed at the end of the questionnaire. A 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Stereotype knowledge: computer club, football player) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Overall, 75% of the participants knew the stereotypes, providing evidence that the stereotypes were recognized. However, there was a main effect for stereotype ($F[1, 171] = 40.48, p < .001$), indicating that significantly more students knew the football player stereotype ($\bar{X} = .93$) than knew the computer club stereotype ($\bar{X} = .69$). Furthermore, there was a significant interaction between gender of adolescent and stereotype, $F(1, 171) = 16.3, p < .001$. Although boys ($\bar{X} = .90$) and girls ($M\bar{X} = .96$) equally were aware of the football player stereotype, a significantly greater number of boys ($\bar{X} = .81$) than girls ($\bar{X} = .57$) knew the computer club stereotype. Further analyses were conducted both with and without stereotype knowledge as a factor but because stereotype knowledge was not found to be significant in any of the analyses it was dropped.

A series of 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Group: computer club, football team) 2 (transgression: school dance, computers) ANOVAs were conducted on each of the dependent measures. Post hoc follow-up tests were conducted using Fisher least significant difference (LSD) comparisons of the cell means within each group. The means and the results of the post hoc comparisons are shown in Table 1. A correlational analysis among the three dependent measures

TABLE 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Evaluations, Severity, Justified, and Likelihood Ratings as a Function of Reference Group and Transgression

Reference Group by Transgression	Judgments and Ratings			
	Evaluation	Severity	Justified	Likelihood
Football players				
Damaging computer	.91 ^a (.25)	4.91 ^a (2.13)	5.91 (1.57)	2.82 ^a (1.30)
Breaking sound equipment	.77 ^b (.43)	3.98 ^b (2.64)	5.00 (2.05)	3.65 ^b (1.38)
Overall mean	.84 (.37)	4.45 (2.13)	5.46 (1.87)	3.23 (1.40)
Computer club members				
Breaking sound equipment	.84 ^a (.37)	4.16 ^a (2.13)	4.69 (1.73)	2.80 ^a (1.38)
Damaging computer	.77 ^b (.43)	3.01 ^b (2.13)	4.77 (1.46)	3.32 ^b (1.77)
Overall mean	.80 (.40)	3.59 (2.13)	4.73 (1.60)	3.06 (1.60)

NOTE: Evaluation: 0 = *all right*, 1 = *not all right*; Severity: 1 = *a little bad*, 7 = *very, very bad*; Justified: 1 = *completely justified*, 7 = *completely unjustified*; Likelihood: 1 = *not likely at all*, 7 = *very, very likely*. Means within a column for each reference group with different superscripts are significantly different by Fisher LSD test at $p < .05$.

showed that although they were correlated significantly and positively ($ps < .01$), they were not identical. The correlations are: evaluation-severity, $r = .61$, evaluation-justification $r = .39$, and severity-justification $r = .52$. Therefore, separate analyses were conducted on each of the three measures.

On the evaluation measure, the expected two-way interaction (group \times transgression) was found ($F[1, 172] = 4.67, p < .05$), indicating that a greater proportion of participants rated the decision to punish the group to be "not all right" in the stereotype inconsistent scenarios ($M = .88$) than in the stereotype consistent scenarios ($M = .77$). Additionally, as shown in Table 1, this comparison between stereotype inconsistent and stereotype consistent judgments was significant both for football players and computer club members. There were no other significant effects in this analysis.

The ANOVA for the severity rating revealed a significant main effect for group ($F[1, 172] = 4.35, p < .05$), as well as a significant two-way interaction (Group \times Transgression), $F(1, 172) = 6.86, p < .01$. The latter test demonstrated that participants rated the decision to be more severe in the stereotype inconsistent scenarios ($M = 4.53$) than in the stereotype consistent scenarios ($M = 3.49$). Again, this comparison was significant both for football

players and computer club members. There were no other significant effects in this analysis. These findings show that although adolescents rated it as significantly worse to punish without supporting evidence in stereotype inconsistent conditions than in stereotype consistent conditions both for football players and computer club members, they also rated it as significantly worse, overall, to punish the football players.

The ANOVA on the justified rating revealed significant main effects for gender of participant ($F[1, 171] = 4.57, p < .05$), and for group ($F[1, 171] = 4.86, p < .05$), but the expected two-way interaction (Group \times Transgression) was not significant on this measure, $F(1, 171) = 2.55$. Boys ($M = 5.37$) rated the decision as significantly less justified than did girls ($M = 4.79$), and boys and girls both rated the decision as more justified against the computer club members ($M = 4.73$) than against the football players ($M = 5.46$).

For the likelihood rating, a significant two-way interaction (Group \times Transgression) ($F[1, 134] = 9.75, p < .01$), revealed that adolescents rated it as more likely that the group members had committed the stereotype consistent transgressions ($M = 3.53$) than the stereotype inconsistent transgressions ($M = 2.81$). This comparison, again, was significant both for football players and computer club members. There were no other significant effects in this analysis. Those results confirmed that the stereotypical scenarios indeed were associated with adolescents' reasoning by making more salient the stereotypical behaviors of the group.

Justifications

A 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Group) \times 2 (Transgression) \times Justification: moral, social-conventional) ANOVA with repeated measures on justification was performed on the arcsine-transformed proportions of responses (see Winer, 1971). This analysis revealed a main effect for justification ($F[1, 160] = 42.00, p < .001$), indicating that, overall, students used more moral ($M = .71$) than social-conventional ($M = .25$) reasoning. A significant three-way interaction (Group \times Transgression \times Justification) ($F[1, 160] = 5.32, p < .05$), however, indicated that justifications differed according to whether the transgression was consistent with the stereotype of the group. As shown in Table 2, post hoc comparisons revealed that, as expected, adolescents gave a significantly greater proportion of moral reasons in the stereotype inconsistent than the stereotype consistent conditions and also gave a greater proportion of social-conventional reasons in the stereotype consistent than the stereotype inconsistent conditions for both target groups.

TABLE 2: Means and Standard Deviations for Justifications as a Function of Reference Group and Transgression

Reference Group by Transgression	Justification	
	Moral	Social-Conventiona
Football players		
Damaging computer	.89 ^a (.32)	.09 ^a (.28)
Breaking sound equipment	.65 ^a (.48)	.30 ^a (.47)
Mean	.77 (.42)	.19 (.40)
Computer club members		
Breaking sound equipment	.75 ^b (.44)	.21 ^a (.41)
Damaging computer	.55 ^b (.50)	.41 ^a (.50)
Mean	.65 (.48)	.30 (.46)

a. Means within a column for each reference group are significantly different at $p < .05$ by Fisher LSD test.

b. Means within a column for each reference group are significantly different at $p < .06$.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with recent research that has emphasized the ways in which adolescents value social responsibility and moral obligations (Eisenberg, 1990; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Killen & Turiel, 1998; Yates & Youniss, 1997), the present results also provide a positive view of adolescent social reasoning. Overall, adolescents saw the act of blaming someone without evidence as not all right, and justified their evaluation using moral reasons. Even though stereotypes about social reference groups were very potent, adolescents reasoned that it would be unfair to punish a group linked to an act of vandalism by stereotypic attributions if there was not enough evidence that the members of the group committed the act.

Yet, the findings also confirmed the expectation that group stereotypes would be associated with adolescents' social decision-making about the appropriateness of punishing members of high school reference groups for accused transgressions. When the transgression was consistent with stereotypical expectations about the group being blamed, the likelihood of moral reasoning and the disapproval of the act was reduced significantly in comparison to the stereotype inconsistent scenarios. These findings indicated that stereotypes were associated with decision-making in ambiguous situations

because they made more salient social-conventional principles about appropriate behavior and were related to a decrease in concerns about fairness and justice based on the lack of evidence.

These findings are unique in the literature and indicate another way that stereotypes might operate to influence social judgments. Traditional theories would hold that stereotypes operate to reduce the cognitive load on the information processing system. For instance, Bodenhausen and Lichtenstein (1987) posited that individuals rely more heavily on stereotypes in assigning guilt in cognitively complex contexts. The results of this study, however, indicated an alternative explanation. The findings of the study revealed that stereotype consistent behaviors were associated with an increase in the use of social-conventional principles in comparison to moral principles. These findings conceptually replicated other work (see Smetana, 1988, 1989, 1995b) that found that the outcomes of social reasoning were influenced by the judgmental principles applied to the evaluation of situations. In a number of studies, Smetana (1988, 1989) found that a majority of conflicts between adolescents and parents centered around everyday types of tasks such as the adolescent cleaning his or her room and that the source of the conflict was based in the differing aspects of the situations that were most salient to each party. In a majority of the cases, adolescents used principles pertaining to personal choice to make the decision, whereas parents made appeals to more social-conventional principles such as house rules and the functioning of the family (Smetana, 1988, 1989). The findings of the present study provide further evidence for the claim that differing domains of reasoning exist and that the reasoning an individual brings to bear on a situation is related to his or her judgments regarding those situations.

It should be noted also that the authors do not mean to equate social-conventional reasoning with stereotypic knowledge. Some participants judged that the social group should be punished as a way to maintain order in the school. This form of reasoning by itself does not involve the attribution of a generalized trait to a social group. However, this form of reasoning was activated more often when the group in question was viewed as one that conformed to the stereotyped activities associated with the group. Group stereotypes were not the only way to reason about social groups, nor was social-conventional reasoning only detected by the use of stereotypes. In further research, it would be helpful to examine the ways in which knowledge about social groups informs decision-making in positive ways. Additionally, it

would be important to examine the ways in which knowledge about stereotypic traits as well as activities influenced social and moral reasoning.

Whereas, overall, the results of this study confirmed the hypothesis that punishing stereotype consistent transgressions would be seen as less wrong, the study also indicated that adolescents' judgments differed depending on the group involved in the scenario. Adolescents rated the student council president's act of blaming the football players as significantly worse than the act of blaming the computer club members both for stereotype consistent and stereotype inconsistent scenarios. There are several potential explanations for this finding. One possibility is that the football players (jocks) typically have higher status within the social hierarchy of the adolescent reference groups than do the computer club members (techies) (Brown et al., 1994; Eckert, 1989; Kirchler, Palmonari, & Pombeni, 1994; Youniss et al., 1994). That higher status might afford football players more popularity or recognition leading more adolescents to see punishing them as wrong. It is also possible that because the football players likely were members of a higher status group than were the computer club members, more students would want to identify themselves with the football players (Kirchler et al., 1994; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Conversely, because the computer club members might be seen as a low status group, students might not identify themselves with that group, leading them to judge members of that group more negatively. In further research, it would be beneficial to gather information regarding the social status of differing social groups and to analyze whether social status influences decision-making.

Additionally, although few gender differences were found, the groups included in the present study typically were associated more with boys. This could explain why more boys than girls seemed to be familiar with the stereotypes of both groups. Further research needs to investigate how adolescents reason about reference groups that vary according to the type of group (by gender or race), as well as the status of the group.

Moreover, it would be helpful to examine the relation between reference group stereotypes and adolescent decision-making regarding scenarios that reflect not only moral issues involving retributive justice, but other types of moral issues as well such as distributive justice (Damon, 1983) or the granting of individual rights in concrete contexts (such as freedom of speech, see Helwig, 1997). Do stereotypes about social reference groups influence judgments other than those involving the assignment of punishment? Given the powerful influence that reference groups have on adolescent self-identity (Brown, 1990) and on social development (Youniss et al., 1994), it is important to know the extent to which stereotypes about groups influence differing types of social and moral decision-making during adolescence.

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