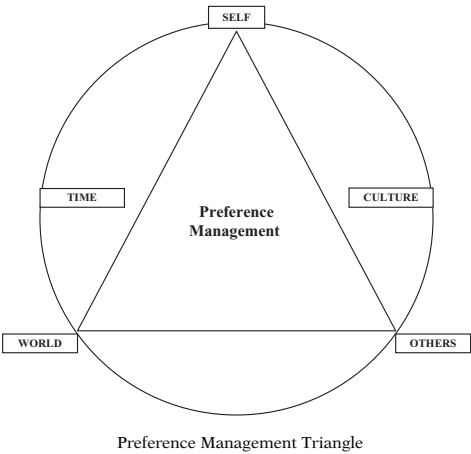


Introduction

I do not wish to arouse conviction; I wish to stimulate thought and to upset prejudices.

(Freud, 1917/1973, p. 281)

In this book, I consider children’s social development from the perspective of preferences and preference management. The preferences with which I am concerned are those of adults as they interact with and attempt to socialize infants and children and the preferences of children as they acquire language and use it in the pursuit of their preferences in their interaction with adults, siblings, and peers. My goal in writing this book is to trace how infants and children come to verbally express their preferences and their emergent strategies for the management of these preferences as they interact with and experience conflict with others who also have their own preferences. Social development reflects the interplay between children’s and other people’s preferences as these preferences are interwoven in infants’ and children’s daily lives, influencing every aspect of their social world and spurring their cognitive development as they attempt to actualize their preferences in their interaction with it. Social interaction requires children to develop behavioral and cognitive strategies for navigating their own preferences in the sea of other social beings who are similarly navigating their preferences while, at the same time, parents are attempting to steer children’s preferences toward normative and legal shores. Socialization is the universal meeting grounds of infants’, children’s, and other people’s preferences. In these meeting grounds, children learn to pursue their preferences within the constraints imposed by others and society, developing necessary behavioral and cognitive strategies for the management of preferences both in oneself and in others. The need to navigate social life – to learn to express our preferences, to get others to help us actualize them, to negotiate with others about our respective preferences, and to cope with preference deferral, preference elimination, and preferential conflict – is the focus of the preference management process and this book.



WHY PREFERENCES?

Why focus on preferences? In line with Bowles and Gintis (2006), I see preferences as reasons for goal-oriented behavior, as the link between ourselves, the objects and people that surround us, and the behavior that our social and physical environments afford us. Infants in all cultures are born with some preferences, and, with development, they acquire other preferences. Preferences are evident in the foods they eat, the toys and activities they select, the playmates they choose, the books they buy once they learn to read, and to some extent, the professions they enter when they grow up. As Hansson and Grüne-Yanoff (2006) argue, every choice, even a simple choice, such as choosing between two candies, “may be based on a preference for a world in which one eats candy X over a world in which one eats candy Y.” This alternative world needs to be represented in order for one’s preferences to be pursued in the real world, so that cognitive processes are integral to the pursuit of one’s preferences. In this view, cognition

evolved to serve the essential needs of an agent. Cognition, in the process of helping to satisfy needs and following motivational forces, has to take into account environments, their regularities and structures. Thus, cognition bridges the needs and motivations of an agent and its environments (be it physical or social), thereby linking all three in a 'triad.' (Sun, 2007)

Despite the triadic linkage he posits, Sun does not accord others in one's social world the importance they deserve in structuring the environment, in socializing preferences, in teaching modes of thinking, and in the intricate negotiations that they force infants and children to enter into in order to satisfy their own preferences. This intricate interplay will be of pivotal focus in this book.

Piaget (1967) noted that there are some constant functions that are common to all ages. In the realm of preferences, we can see continuity because, at all ages, individuals act in order to actualize their preferences, doing so within the constraints of their developmental stage and the social culture in which they live, using those strategies that they believe are likely to be successful in doing so. But other people and society do not always budge to accommodate our preferences so that preferences need to be managed, both to facilitate their pursuit and to cope with preference blockage. Preference management is a universal aspect of social life – infants, children, and parents in all cultures have to play the same preference management "game." The means of preference management that infants and children develop are brought to bear throughout their lives as they interact with others while pursuing their own preferences. Examining social development through the prism of preference management allows us to see how infants' social world is shaped by the preferences of those around them, how they, in turn, shape their world by expressing their preferences to others, and the way that conflicting preferences spur development by requiring preferential conflict to be resolved.

My focus on preferences does not reflect either philosophical or psychological hedonism. Rather, in line with Frankfurt's (1971, 1988) analysis, it emphasizes that although when talking of desires, we are indifferent as to which of them are actualized, preferences imply that we reflect, choose, and evaluate our desires. We have a stake in the conflict between our desires. The existence of preferences implies that one could rank the comparative desirability of one thing over another, justifying it by saying "p is better than q because . . ." (cf., Doyle, 2004). In this view, preferences are cognitive structures or mental representations that guide our choices, and our choices reflect our underlying preferences. This is evident in young children's explanations that thinking is preference centered: "You think of things you want to do" (Piaget, 1929/1975, p. 49), and that thinking of something means "you want to have it" (ibid, p. 50). In this view, preferences as mental representations can serve as anchors of comparison and guidelines in trying to align the world *as is* and the world *as preferred*.

Importantly, we tend to define ourselves with reference to our preferences. We abstract from our concrete

experiences to more general statements of preference, allowing the unnamed character in *Green Eggs and Ham* (Dr. Seuss, 1960) to conclude, despite repeated protestation to the contrary, "Say, I like green eggs and ham! I do!" In fact, when children and adults are asked to tell about themselves, after listing vital statistics, they cite preferences, those psychological aspects of self that uniquely define them (e.g., "I am a Baroque music lover, Baskin Robins fan"). We can define ourselves with reference to our preferences because our preferences are remarkably stable. We repeatedly buy the same foods in the supermarket, order the same meals at our favorite restaurant, engage in the same free-time activities, and tend to live in the same house with the same furniture and significant others for many years. Preferences run our lives. We structure our lives to accommodate them, make elaborate plans that enable us to attain them, and take vacations that coddle them.

The stability of our preferences often outlives their usefulness. Many adults "love" their cars and keep investing money in their upkeep for lengthy periods of time when it is no longer financially rational to do so. My son at age 7 refused to part with his favorite shoes, bought at age 5, despite their being worn and too small to wear. I myself spent years trying to find replacements for the colorful nomad rugs that were wrecked by the cleaners when I was an adolescent, jumping for joy at accidentally finding similar rugs when my own children were adolescents. As these anecdotes illustrate, some of our preferences remain steadfast, often leading us into grief-like states when a "loved" object is broken, worn out, or is lost.

On the other hand, our preferences are not as stable as we would like to think they are. They may change spontaneously over time; as Freud (1901) noted about his own acquired taste for spinach,<sup>1</sup> most people do start eating spinach at some point in life. Preferences also change with exposure to the preference objects themselves. The cry "Not spaghetti again!" expresses the delicate balance between underexposure and overexposure to preference objects. The phenomenon of saying "I have nothing to wear" while looking at a full closet similarly reflects the fact that preferences are not frozen in time. Spring break provides a longed-for respite from the snow, even for those who pronounce that they love winter. Time and recurrence, then, can engender changes in our preferences. Importantly, preferences are objects of communication and negotiation with others, and they can change as a function of such negotiation, as well as through planning and deliberation (cf. Doyle, 2004). The fact that preferences can be the subject of conversation makes them ripe targets of influence for others who may want to change our preferences, both for our own benefit and for their own egoistic reasons.

<sup>1</sup> Freud (1901) says, "for a long time I detested spinach then eventually my taste changed and I promoted that vegetable into one of my favourite foods" (p. 639).

## INTRODUCTION

3

From my perspective, though, it is not the preferences that are important. Rather, it is the fact that not all preferences are immediately available but may need to be pursued over time, that other people can serve as agents who satisfy or thwart the pursuit of our preferences, that other people have their own preferences for what they want for themselves and what they want for and from us, and that juggling these diverse demands requires us to develop cognitive and behavioral preference management skills for dealing with ourselves and with others.

Freud's (e.g., 1933/1965) depiction of the battle between the Id and the Superego as mediated by the Ego beautifully captures the potential conflict between our own preferences and those of parents and society and underlines the need to placate both them and ourselves in our behavioral choices. In addition, from my perspective, Freud rightfully put the motivational engine prior to the cognitive cart. In contrast, Piaget (1964/1967, 1995) provided the theoretical underpinnings of an approach in which cognition drives development. Although he often reiterated the joint working of cognition and motivation, Piaget gave the motivational underpinnings of social life the short shrift in most of his theoretical work. I deliberately attempt to redress this, presenting preferences as the motivational engine that spurs the acquisition of language and communication. That is, I see the need to communicate one's preferences to others, infer others' preferences, and coordinate and align one's own preferences with those of others as the central tasks of social development.

## INTRAPERSONAL PREFERENTIAL CONFLICT

Many of our preferences are ones we wish we did not have. I love chocolate, but whenever I eat chocolate, I regret having done so. We want not to want to eat desserts or smoke cigarettes. Philosophers (e.g., Dworkin, 1988; Frankfurt, 1988) contend that the mark of personhood is the ability to reflect on our preferences and evaluate whether or not they are preferences we should have, evaluations known as *second-order preferences*. Having second-order preferences means that there is always a potential for *intrapersonal conflict* with our first-order preferences. Yet children are not born with second-order preferences; they acquire them during the process of socialization. Mothers attempt to socialize children's preferences, and children gradually adopt second-order preferences about their own preferences (e.g., "I should eat spinach because it's healthy"). A wise 12-year-old reflects understanding of second-order preferences when he refers to being tempted as "you want to do something that you don't want to do" (Sonuga-Barke & Webley, 1993, p. 39).

When our second-order preferences differ from our first-order preferences – when we experience intrapersonal preferential conflict – we need to align these two types of preference. The alignment of intrapersonal preferential conflict can work in one of two possible directions. The first of these involves attempts to transform our first-order

preferences to match our second-order preferences. Dieting, for instance, can be viewed as an instance of such alignment. The person says "I love to eat chocolate," while at the same time saying, "I shouldn't love to eat chocolate because it's unhealthy or fattening." In dieting, one imposes controls over one's first-order preferences as a means of aligning these two levels of preference. Activating self-control processes in the context of intrapersonal preferential conflict engages cognitive practices that work to transform our first-order preferences to align them with our second-order preferences. Of course, society plays a large part in determining the second-order preferences that individuals adopt. Cultures may foster dieting, saving money, and sexual abstinence as second-order preferences that attempt to constrain how we eat, spend money, and socialize.

However, individuals often allow their first-order preferences to override their second-order preferences and need to cope with the mismatch. Consequently, the second route we can take when our first- and second-order preferences conflict involves cognitively transforming our second-order preferences to align them with our first-order preferences. Such cognitive transformations are well exemplified in postdecisional dissonance (Festinger, 1957), which is often manifest in changes in the evaluation of preferences. As Festinger noted, however, conflict between first and second-order preferences can arise prior to decision making and can be rectified in various ways by playing with the underlying representations. Consequently, the need to resolve intrapersonal preferential conflict can activate what I call *mind play*, in which cognitive transformations are undertaken to alter our representations of reality and allow us to live more peacefully with ourselves. Socialization agents play an important role in fostering such cognitive transformations, by teaching children how to engage in such processes and specifically, by socializing the types of mind play they can adopt in attempting to cope. Viewing the emergence of such cognitive processes in developing children provides an important window to our understanding of how society shapes our motivational, cognitive, and behavioral choices and guides us into becoming the kinds of adults we become. The focus on the transformational processes employed in the resolution of conflict between our first- and second-order preferences allows us to see the parallels between behavioral and cognitive self-control, viewing them both as means of resolving *intrapersonal preferential conflict*.

Intrapersonal preferential conflict often involves the temporal dimension because not all preferences are available at the same time. Consequently, managing one's preferences involves the temporal dimension. As Schelling (1984) quips, "*now* I want *not* to do those things then," but as *then* becomes *now*, our preferences change. But because preferences change over time partly as a consequence of previous actions taken, they often mock us, making the socialization of the temporal dimension critical for preference management. Moreover, even in contexts that

seemingly do not involve the temporal dimension, time is implicated because the likely consequences of each choice need to be forecast. March (1978) suggests that choices are guided by *guesses* – guesses about the future consequences of current actions and guesses about our future preferences for these consequences. That is, current choices are made based on what we think our preferences will be in the future; choices in the present need to be made with the future self in mind. But the way individuals relate to their future self is also a function of culture, with different cultures fostering greater or lesser concern with one's future.

#### INTERPERSONAL PREFERENTIAL CONFLICT

Preferences and choices are not made in a social vacuum; they are acquired within a social world, and this social world is not indifferent to our preferences. First, other people also have preferences, and their preferences extend into realms that impinge on us. The coexistence of preferences in oneself and in others necessarily implies that the prospect of *interpersonal preferential conflict* is omnipresent in the child's life, in interaction with parents, siblings, and peers. By focusing on the preference management process, I show how social life forces us to recognize others as social beings, because they too express their preferences and demand that we take account of these preferences when we interact with them.

Within this framework, social behavior can be undertaken with or without regard to other people's preferences. In my view, there is a continuum from behavior undertaken at the expense of other people's preferences (i.e., aggressive behavior) to behavior undertaken to promote other people's preferences, rather than our own preferences (i.e., altruistic behavior). On this continuum, there are also behaviors undertaken without regard to other people's preferences (i.e., inconsiderate or egoistic behavior) and behaviors that defer to other people's preferences (i.e., considerate behavior). In this context, I see moral behavior as behavior in which the preferences of generic others guide one's behavior in settings in which one's short-term preferences would have led one to behave otherwise. The concept of generic others, with a past, a present, and a future, and preferences that need to be taken into account in guiding our behavior toward them while pursuing our preferences, is critical for this process.

Crucially, other people also have preferences as to the kinds of preferences that we *should* have. Societies, governments, educational systems, and parents all have their own ideas and preferences regarding our preferences. They all prefer that we help rather than harm other people, avoid littering in public, and generally adopt prevailing rules and norms of conduct. It is because parents have preferences regarding their children, what Harsanyi (1988) calls *external preferences*, that infants and children are first exposed to attempts to socialize their preferences. Parents know how they want their children to end up, and they try to channel, temporize, restrict, and discipline

their children in their attempt to get them to mind parents' external preferences. Laws, local ordinances, and context-bound rules are passed in the attempt to impose societal preferences on us, based on the implicit assumption that our own preferences do not match them and need to be aligned via such imposition. Laws are enacted because there is an assumption that given free choice, each citizen's own preferences would lead him to behave in ways that would conflict with the preferences of others. Societal external preferences regarding the citizen's preferences differ from his first-order preferences, and the law reflects this preference gap. The Ten Commandments give voice to some of the spheres in which preference gaps are universal. Actual or assumed preference gaps result in our preferences being manipulated both by close others and distant others who also have an interest in manipulating our preferences (e.g., "Nothing comes between me and my Calvin Kleins" – from an ad for Calvin Klein jeans), not necessarily with our own best interest at heart (cf., George, 2001).

There are many occasions when we cannot attain our preferences without someone else's intervention or help. As infants and children, we rely on socialization agents, especially parents, to help us attain our preferences. As adults, we may also need others' help to do so. In such cases, we need to know how to get others' to behave in ways that will facilitate the actualization of our own preferences. We develop strategies of getting others to help us satisfy our preferences, doing so while keeping in mind that they also have preferences, and figuring out the implications of such preferences for the pursuit of our own preferences. Managing one's own preferences and managing those of others are often intertwined.

Critically, how socialization agents manage their own preferences is inexorably bound with the way they manage children's preferences. As Schelling (1984) argues, the way people cope, or try to cope, with the need to control themselves is much like the way in which they exercise command over another person. Our personalities are reflected in the strategies we adopt for interacting with the world around us (e.g., Mischel, Cantor, & Feldman, 1996), and such strategies come into play when we attempt to resolve both interpersonal and intrapersonal preferential conflict, whether with children or with adults. As I elaborate later, doing so in the context of interacting with oneself involves many of the same cognitive skills and strategies that are involved in the context of interacting with others. Adopting this perspective on social development leads to consideration of those processes that are critical to managing our preferences in ourselves and in our interaction with others: persuasion, role taking, moral judgment, and transformational thought, processes that are of interest to both academic and nonacademic audiences.

#### COGNITIVE PROCESSES IN PREFERENCE MANAGEMENT

Preference management requires the application of both online and offline processes (cf., Bickerton, 1995;

## INTRODUCTION

5

Gärdenfors, 2005). Whereas online processes refer to how we cognitively process and react to the world out there, offline processes refer to how we cognitively manipulate our own representations. Doing so engages transformational thought. Transformational thought (Berlyne, 1965; Karniol, 1986; 1990b) takes either external or internal stimuli and creates new internal stimuli, such as thoughts and affective reactions or a combination of both. Transformational thought involves both decontextualization and recontextualization. Decontextualization refers to psychologically removing oneself from the *here-and-now*, allowing one not to respond to the immediate features of the current context, to delay responding, and to engage in self-regulation. Bronowski (1977; but see also Gärdenfors, 2005) claims that the ability to decontextualize is the hallmark of humanity and the central factor that distinguishes us from our animal ancestors. But decontextualization is only part of the story. The other part is recontextualization, the introduction of something that has been decontextualized into a new context in which it is given a new meaning because of its new surroundings. So decontextualization necessarily goes hand in hand with recontextualization, symbolically representing current contexts in terms that transform their meaning for the individual. Transformational thought is the unique human ability that integrates both *decontextualization*, distancing ourselves from the concrete present, and *recontextualization*, transforming the immediate environment, symbolically *re-presenting* objects and events. Piaget and Inhelder (1973) go as far as calling man “a machine engaged in transformations” (p. 8), and Piaget elaborates that

to know is to assimilate reality into systems of transformations. To know is to transform reality.... Knowing reality means constructing systems of transformations that correspond, more or less adequately, to reality... (transformational structures) are simply possible isomorphic models among which experience can enable us to choose. (Piaget, 1970, p. 15)

Bruner (1964) further stipulates that, as part of their development, children become capable of “translating experience into a symbol system that can be operated on by rules of transformation” (p. 11), allowing for the representation of experience as well as the transformation of representations of experience that can then be used in decision making and problem solving.

It is the ability to use our thoughts to transform reality – and even our desires – that makes us uniquely human. The joint work of decontextualization and recontextualization in transformational thought enables children to cope when their preferences cannot be actualized, allowing them both to distance themselves psychologically from their preferences and to think about their preferences in the past and in the future. Transformational thought allows us to view a rose as a message of love rather than a red flower with a thorny stem, and transformational thought lets us interpret our behavior in ways that promote or undermine our

control efforts (cf., Dweck, 2006). It also underlies our ability to delay gratification and keep secondary and long-term goals steadfast, deemphasizing the relevance of obstacles and temptations as they attempt to derail us from our chosen path.

Transformational thought is also critical for interacting with others. We need to heed others’ preferences, to endow others with thoughts and feelings, and to use these in the attempt to impact their preferences, by negotiating, arguing, and manipulating them in the service of our own preferences. Social life requires us to get a handle on others’ likely reactions to the pursuit of our preferences so we can guide our behavior in light of our reading of these psychological reactions. This guessing game – conducting mental transformations about other people’s thoughts and feelings – has been of central focus in my own work (e.g., Karniol, 1986, 1990b, 2003a). It is variously discussed under the rubric of the Theory of Mind, perspective taking, role taking, and empathy – terms that in my view occlude the transformational nature of mentalizing. As I elaborate in later chapters, just as transformations are applied to ponder one’s own experiences in the past and in the future, mental transformations are used for “cracking” into others’ minds to link their experiences with their preferences and their likely psychological reactions.

My contention in this book is that children learn to conduct transformations along three planes of thought: (1) the temporal plane, (2) the imaginal plane, and (3) the mental plane, that they learn to do so from parents who engender transformations on these planes when they talk to their children, and that, by conducting such transformations, children become more adept at resolving both their own and other people’s interpersonal and intrapersonal preferential conflicts.

## THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

Transformational thought is acquired in the context of language acquisition and social communication. Children learn not only to speak but “when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where in what manner” (Hymes, 1972, p. 277). That is, children are socialized through language, and their use of language reflects their understanding of social mores and of other individuals within the social contexts in which they find themselves. Through language, individuals become culturally intelligent beings, pursuing their preferences within a social milieu that both dictates preferences and facilitates or hinders the actualization of preferences. From this perspective, much of what we know is tacit knowledge learned through joint activities and conversations with others, others who have their own preferences and external preferences regarding our preferences, often leading to interpersonal preferential conflict with them. Because language is a symbol system, through language, children come to understand that one can refer symbolically to absent people and worlds and transform present worlds into alternative worlds that exist only in their minds.

The critical developments from the current perspective, then, are awareness of one's own preference structure, the understanding that others have preferences, the ability to figure out what preferences others have, being able to engage in transformational thought, and developing the concept of generic others. These cognitive processes yield the data that feed into the decision-making process when we decide how to pursue our preferences. They are the cognitive pillars on which social development is mounted, and which allow for interpersonal and intrapersonal preferential conflict to be resolved and for altruism and moral behavior to emerge, as I elaborate in later chapters.

#### PLAN OF THE BOOK

My aim in this book is to show how preference management emerges out of the infant's interaction with his mother, how it is engaged in by mothers vis à vis their infants and children, and how children become moral or immoral beings who behave in ways that manifest their concern, or lack of concern, with other people's preferences. I focus on the intricate pattern of negotiation that emerges as infants, children, and parents express their preferences to each other, cognitively manipulate each other's preferences, and behaviorally adapt and adopt ways of behaving that actualize their own and other people's preferences. It is this intertwining of our preferences, the preferences of others, and our use of behavioral and cognitive strategies in traversing the world that is the spice of social life.

First, it should be noted at the outset that this book does not offer behavioral guidelines for parents. What this book does is trace how preference management emerges in infancy, how it changes with the acquisition of language, how parents promote and foster preference management in their children, and the cognitive processes that are involved in this remarkable journey. My approach is interdisciplinary and draws on research and theorizing in psychology (e.g., developmental, social, and personality psychology), language acquisition, socialization, and communication, underlining the way these are intertwined in children's social development. I think this book would be of interest to anyone – whether lay person, parent, student, or academic – who is interested in children, in their social and language development, as well as in socialization and parent-child communication. The fact that the book is thematic rather than topical or age based, allows me to portray a coherent picture of social development that, in my view, may also make the book useful as complementary reading for courses in developmental psychology, social development, parent education, parent-child relations, communication, and language socialization.

In contrast to topical treatments of social development, then, this book is thematic, presenting preferences and preference management as the glue that integrates the different domains of social development. As such, it sheds a new and unique perspective on social development,

socialization, and language socialization – a perspective that has not been adopted in any other book – placing preferential conflict at the heart of social life. I do not see this perspective as conflicting with other theoretical perspectives on social development but rather as complementing and enriching our understanding of the way language and cognitive processes serve children's development as social beings who are in pursuit of their preferences and who can help and hinder others in the pursuit of their preferences. Second, the book presents preferential conflict – both interpersonal and intrapersonal – as the force that provides continuity across social life, a continuity that is a direct outcome of the need for individuals to manage their preferences and resolve both interpersonal and intrapersonal preferential conflict throughout their lives.

This book is set up in three interlocking parts, each of which can be read independently of the others, and which together form the essence of a theory of social development. In this theory, infants first need to crack into the language system in order to facilitate their expression of preferences to those around them but also because others are incessantly telling children their preferences and want children to mind these preferences. Children need to learn to mind others' preferences because they can thereby increase the likelihood of furthering their own preferences. As part and parcel of this, children need to learn to identify their own preferences so they can develop more adaptive means of pursuing these preferences, and they need to develop means of identifying the preferences of others when others do not express their preferences directly. Children's understanding that others have preferences, both in general and about what they themselves should or should not be doing, is an important part of socialization and is conveyed to children via the strategies that parents use to get their children to adopt behaviors, delay behaviors, and terminate behaviors, often resorting to disciplinary tactics when children fail to heed. Concomitantly, parental linguistic practices allow children to disengage from the here-and-now, learning to transform on the temporal plane, the imaginal plane, and the mental plane. These transformational planes are critical for children's attempts to manage their preferences, both in interacting with others and in modulating their own attempts to cope with others as well as with the unavailability of their own preferences. Hence, language and the ability to engage in transformational thought are the keys for developing strategies of preference management and for using them when faced with either interpersonal or intrapersonal preferential conflict.

To outline the three sections of the book, the first section, Chapters 1–4, follows infants and their mothers into childhood, as they communicate about their respective preferences and infants learn to verbally express their preferences, discuss them, and get others to satisfy them, learning in the interim that others are agents with their own preferences – preferences that may lead them to opt not to satisfy infants' and children's preferences. Chapter 1 focuses on how babies and their mothers



## INTRODUCTION

7

communicate with each other regarding their respective preferences. It underlines mothers' treatment of their infants as communicative and intentional beings who have preferences and can communicate these preferences to others. Chapter 2 addresses the transition to language and children's use of language to communicate their preferences to others, doing so within the context of their emergent understanding of others as social and psychological beings. I emphasize the transition from references to *here-and-now* to references to objects and events that are temporally and spatially distant. Chapter 3 traces the emergence of meta-preferences, children's understanding of both stable and unstable preferences in themselves, and their perceptions of themselves as amalgams of particular types of preferences, in contradistinction to others. Chapter 4 turns to children's understanding of other people's preferences, the emergence of the concept of generic others, and the theories that have been advanced to account for the emergence of such understanding. I consider my own theory, as well as simulation, Theory of Mind, and approaches that posit that self serves as the default for understanding others.

The second section of the book, traced in Chapters 5–9, focuses on parents and the strategies they use to influence the preferences their children have: channeling preferences, temporizing preferences, restricting preferences, and disciplining children when they don't adopt the preferences parents want them to adopt. Cross cutting these strategies are the language practices that parents adopt in dealing with their children and the transformational skills that they engender in children by virtue of how they talk of absent realities. Chapter 5 deals with parenting in general, outlining approaches that have been used to account for the relationship among parenting, language use, and social class. The following chapters address socialization strategies more explicitly. In Chapter 6, I address the means by which parents channel their children's preferences toward those objects and behaviors that they want their children to prefer. Chapter 7 focuses on temporization: how parents use the time dimension in orienting their children to objects and actions (i.e., "not now – later"; "do it right now") and how children themselves learn to use the temporal dimension in their interaction with others. Chapter 8 outlines the strategies parents use to restrict their children's behavior, to get them to avoid objects and behaviors that are dispreferred by parents. The final chapter in this section, Chapter 9, turns to the strategies parents use to discipline their children when they do not adopt parental preferences.

The third section of the book, elaborated in Chapters 10–14, focuses on the processes of preference management: the emergence of the planes of transformational thought, children's use of language to manipulate others to attain their preferences, coping with intrapersonal preferential conflict, using mind play as means of cognitively transforming our own and others' preferential worlds, and minding other people's preferences, the *sine qua non* of

altruism and morality. Chapter 10 addresses the socialization of transformational thought on the temporal plane, the imaginal plane, and the mental plane. In particular, I consider how adults teach children to disconnect their preferences from the *here-and-now* and socialize them to imaginably enter other people's psychological worlds, often through pretend play. Chapter 11 provides a summary of the linguistic means children use to get others to do what they want them to do, how they manipulate others to become instruments of their own preferential world. Chapter 12 elaborates what children do to cope and self-regulate when they are faced with preferences they cannot have. Chapter 13 centers on *mind play*, how children and their parents apply transformational thought strategically in their daily life to change their own and other people's representations of their preferential world. I elaborate how children learn to mind play with context, with time, with pretend, and with perspective, and how they induce such mind play in others. Chapter 14 turns to altruism, aggression, and morality, elaborating how what one knows about other people's preferences is deployed to mind, or not mind, their preferences in undertaking one's actions. Finally, in Chapter 15, I tie up the threads I've woven to link this approach more explicitly with extant theoretical approaches and summarize the essence of the preference management approach.

## THE DATA

The medium through which I address these issues is the language of everyday life that adults and children use in their interaction with each other. The reader may well question the reasons for this choice. First, much of children's emergent language is used to express their preferences to others. Second, language is the primary medium socialization agents use to manage infants' and children's preferences as they attempt to influence the preferences that they have and the physical and temporal dimensions along which preferences are partaken. Language is also the primary means by which others convey their own preferences and through which children learn that the social world is populated by others who are similarly pursuing their potentially conflicting preferences. It is through their conversations and verbal exchanges with parents, siblings, and peers that children construct their representations of the social world and acquire an understanding of the give-and-take of social life that preferential conflict engenders. This makes parental language critical for the representations that their children develop. Moreover, from the perspective of cognitive semantics (e.g., Langacker, 2005), language cannot be either used or understood without reference to virtual entities – fictitious objects and events that are referred to although they do not have any counterparts in reality (e.g., the sentence "your pants are getting shorter" means that the child has been growing). Yet both speakers and listeners need to engage the virtual plane in a similar manner for continued meaningful interaction

between them; meaning is construed and conventionalized rather than intrinsically given. Speakers convert from the actual plane to the virtual plane as they speak and as listeners, children need to perform both transformations from the virtual to the actual plane and additional transformations that are required to interpret sentences in a manner that preserves correspondence between the virtual plane and reality as they know it. Hence, parental language plays a critical role in shaping children's construals of the world, their deployment of transformations, and their relation to others and their preferences. Garrett and Baquedano-López give voice to this view in saying,

As a developmental process, then, language acquisition is far more than a matter of a child learning to produce well-formed referential utterances; it also entails learning how to use language in socially appropriate ways to co-construct meaningful social contexts and to engage with others in culturally relevant meaning-making activities. (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002, p. 342)

My book puts everyday speech in the limelight, letting us hear naturally occurring conversations in which children, parents, and peers communicate about their respective preferences, discuss preferential conflict, and attempt to manage such conflict, both interpersonally and intrapersonally. This makes the book readable, interesting – and sometimes amusing. More importantly, the book captures both the language used by children and the language used in talking to children (cf., Ochs & Schieffelin, 2001), as this language is bandied about in the process of daily living, serving as the means of children's socialization to their culture.

To capture this intricate, interactive process, I gathered samples of naturally occurring talk, relying on child language sources collected by developmental psycholinguists from the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES), (MacWhinney, 2000; accessible at [childes/psy.cmu.edu](http://childes/psy.cmu.edu)), both my own and other researchers' language diary studies, socialization studies, and classroom communication studies, in English and other languages – sources that have recorded naturalistic speech. This is because children "are saying amazing things all the time, if you listen carefully" (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989, p. 158). What they say serves as an index of what they know about the world, the objects and people in it, and their own role in that world. In particular, in their interactions with others, they express their preferences, both about what they want and what they want others to do, to say, and to refrain from doing or saying. In turn, others do the same to them, allowing us to see how preferential communication is used to cope with one's social world. Spontaneous speech captures the motivational platform that provides the backdrop of preference communication and preferential conflict.

In contrast to the zeitgeist of emphasizing how cultures differ, I have tried to demonstrate the cross-cultural

nature of the preference phenomena that are my focus, illustrating my points with data gathered in diverse parts of the world. I provide examples from both English and non-English-speaking children and adults as they interact and communicate with each other about their preferential world. In addition to American and British children, there are samples of children's and adults' speech from Europe (e.g., Germany, France, and Italy), the Middle East (Israel), and the Far East (China and Japan). To simplify, only English is presented in the text, but the interested reader can follow the footnotes to see what was actually said in the original language in which it was said. As well, though children of different ages may differ in their cognitive abilities and the relative sophistication of their language skills, the examples of children's speech provided in each context are purposely drawn from children of varying ages to illustrate the underlying similarities of the motivational underpinnings of *what* is being expressed. Throughout the book, children's age is shown in months and days up to 36 months (e.g., 24;12 represents a child who is 12 days after his second birthday) and in years and months after that (e.g., 3;6 represents a child of 3 and a half years).

Empirical research is cited where it underlines the point being made. I have not attempted to discuss or cite all relevant research in a given domain, and I offer sincere apologies to those colleagues whose work I may have overlooked. In particular, I have explicitly avoided adopting existing classification systems of compliance gaining and persuasion because of the problems in comparing such systems and assessing the knowledge claims that can be made about their use (cf., Kellermann & Cole, 1994), an issue I will address more fully in its relevant context. Moreover, wherever possible, I have avoided using parental self-reports regarding socialization practices because of the generally low correlations between what parents believe, their self-reports, and what they actually do in interaction with their children (cf., Fivush, 1998a; Sigel, 1992). Instead, I have focused on parental socialization in terms of their strategies of channeling preferences, temporizing preferences, restricting preferences, and disciplining non-compliance as parents talk with their children and with researchers. In addition, I have discussed parental fostering of both transformational thought and mind play, cognitive strategies that are generally used by parents implicitly and that have not been incorporated into other theoretical or empirical studies of child socialization.

This book is not a compendium of research studies but, rather, it traces a developmental path from infancy to adolescence as evidenced in what infants do, children say, and parents do and say primarily to each other, but also sometimes to researchers, regarding preferences and preference management. I have taken this tack because social life reflects how we interact with others to attain our preferences in the manner in which we communicate with others, telling them our preferences, comparing our preferences with theirs, and getting them to act on our preferences. The impetus is to get what we want. However, it



## INTRODUCTION

9

is the existence of others with their own preferences and their external preferences regarding ourselves that creates preferential conflict and drives the cognitive engine that finds more and more sophisticated means of outmaneuvering others, persuading them, and playing with our own minds when we do not succeed in doing so. The Preference Management Triangle shown on page 1 of this book refers to the relationship between the world – of objects and people – as they relate to self in time and within a given culture. Preferences relate to the child's physical and social world, and they involve the temporal dimension in that they concern either immediate or delayed preferences. Culture, as mediated by parents in particular, attempts to influence both children's preferences and the relationship of time and self to them, doing so within the framework legitimized in that culture. But irrespective of the particular culture in which one is enmeshed, children and parents are universally engaged in preference management. In talking to their children, parents provide us with a glimpse of this, and children, in talking to their parents and to others around them, provide us with a snapshot of how the world impinges on them and frames their means of attaining their preferences.

My own research is discussed where it has theoretical significance, but I do not see this book as a forum for summarizing my research. On the other hand, I have drawn extensively on the language diaries of my own children, Karen and Orren, diaries that were used in two previously

published papers (Karniol, 1990a, 1992). Because much psycholinguistic research is dedicated to children who are just learning to speak, the book is biased in the direction of toddlers and preschool children rather than older ones. In some sense, though, this is an advantage because it serves to demonstrate how preferences drive our development from infancy onward. Concomitantly, this book provides a convenient timetable for children's emerging language skills in interacting with others at different ages and for the cognitive milestones in the realm of preferences: when children start talking about their own preferences, when they start talking of other people's preferences, when they start to attempt to influence other people's preferences, and so forth.

As will be evident throughout the book, I see preferences as providing an integrative theme that propels social and cognitive development because it compels us to face, head-on, the preferences of others who are like us in striving to actualize their preferences and who may see us as obstacles or stepping stones in the path of the attainment of their preferences, much as we may see them the same way. Although the focus on preferences may seem radical, I hope this book will demonstrate the theoretical and empirical virtue of thinking in these terms. In order to start this journey, I will start by focusing on infants' and children's first foray into the preferential world – the Baby "Preference Game," – or how infants and parents attempt to solve the preference management problem.

# 1

## The Baby “Preference Game”

A toddler crawls into her mother’s lap while the mother is drinking coffee. The mother asks, ‘And what do you want, hmm? You’re not having my coffee. No.’ When the child looks at the observer’s coffee, she says, ‘You’re not having her coffee either.’

(Snow, 1984, p. 81)

In this chapter, I trace the emergent way caretakers, who for the sake of convenience will be called “mothers,” and infants (who for convenience will be referred to as males) communicate with each other in the context of the Baby “Preference Game,” a game that can be described as “you tell me your preferences, I’ll tell you my preferences, and then . . . .” First, I focus on what mothers do to infer their infants’ preferences, and then I elaborate what infants do to convey their preferences to their mothers.

### WHY DO I CALL THIS A GAME?

As I will try to show in this chapter, the interactive episodes that emerge between mothers and their infants are a game for all intents and purposes because both parties try to decipher the rules governing their interaction in the attempt to achieve their goals – getting more of their preferences satisfied and doing so as quickly as possible. But infant–mother interactions have many parallels with the game of charades, because one side can only use physical actions to convey meaning, and the other side needs to infer what these physical actions are supposed to imply. However, in the game of charades, players capitalize on conventionalized symbols whose meanings are socially shared, but the infant players in the Baby “Preference Game” do not know how to use conventionalized symbols. Mothers are the ones who invest time and effort in attempting to decipher their babies’ behavior as signals of their babies’ preferences. At first, babies do not know that their behavior is interpreted by mothers as signals of preferences. They eventually learn that mothers are attributing intentionality to their behavior and that behavior can be used to signal their preferences.

Mothers have a distinct advantage because, as adults, they already know how to play the preference game,

having played it since they were infants. The game changes when their baby is born though because, as mothers, they now have a dual function: they need to satisfy their own preferences, but in order for their baby to thrive, they also need to satisfy the preferences of their baby. In contrast, babies come into this world with preferences but without knowledge of the preference game; they need to learn how to play it within the constraints of their families and their culture. For this to happen, they need to learn to communicate and interact with others whose preferences they need to take into account in satisfying their own preferences. But in contrast to many games, the Baby “Preference Game” is a non–zero sum game: if the baby wins, so does the mother; if the baby loses, its mother loses too. This is because mother and child are interdependent – a happy baby generally has a happy mother and vice versa. Tracing the emergence of this game requires us to focus on what mothers do when they communicate with their infants, what infants do when they communicate with their mothers, and what the implications of this interactive game are for the unfolding of infants’ preferences.

How do mothers play the game? From the moment infants are born, mothers attempt to understand what their babies are “saying” to them. As Camaioni (1993) claims, mothers react to babies’ spontaneous behavior as if it were intentional, interpreting it in terms of intentions, goals, wishes, and communicative symbols. The mother is constantly monitoring her baby, imputing meaning to his actions. When a baby spits out food, she assumes he doesn’t want it; when a baby grimaces, she assumes he doesn’t like it. His actions speak to her when his linguistic abilities do not yet do so. To illustrate, when an infant starts playing with his lunch, his mother interprets this as refusal to eat; she says, “No more? All right. You finish your drink then” (Snow, 1984, p. 80). In this context, Newson (1979) contends that mothers engage in a process of “adultomorphism” – attributing even to newborns the human power of social responsiveness, with wishes, intentions, and feelings that they can communicate to others. From my perspective, mothers treat their newborns as individuals with distinct preferences, and they attempt to decipher