

Domain Specificity in Adolescents' Concepts of Laws: Associations Among Beliefs and Behavior

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Using detailed vignettes and scale measures, concepts of laws regulating domain-specific issues and engagement in delinquency were assessed among 340 9th through 12th graders ($M_{\text{age}} = 16.64$, $SD = 1.37$). Adolescents distinguished between laws that regulate moral, drug-related prudential, conventional, personal, and multifaceted issues in their criterion judgments and justifications. Youths' ratings of the importance of laws, obligation to obey laws, and deserved punishment for breaking different laws also followed domain-consistent patterns. Adolescents' engagement in moral, drug-related prudential, and multifaceted forms of delinquency was associated with less supportive judgments about laws within the same domain. Findings contribute to civic development research by demonstrating domain specificity in adolescents' beliefs about laws and suggest that these beliefs are linked with engagement in similar types of delinquency.

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by increased abstract reasoning abilities and more sophisticated social understanding (Smetana & Villalobos, 2009). During adolescence, youth also engage in higher levels of delinquency, have more frequent contact with law officers, and experience greater exposure to legal systems (Moffitt, 1993; Snyder, Espiritu, Huizinga, Loeber, & Petechuck, 2000). This coalescence of emerging and transforming social-cognitive reasoning and increased interactions with legal structures may prompt the formation of more nuanced beliefs about laws and government. For some youth, these beliefs may include questioning the limitations and boundaries of institutional authority, while recognizing potential social benefits stemming from government sanctions (Adelson, 1972). Distinguishing between issues that are subject to legitimate government regulation versus those that concern one's own prerogative is an important component of civic development (Flanagan, 2013). Little research has examined teens' developing beliefs about different types of laws and how this might relate to their engagement in delinquency (Flanagan, 2013; Tisak & Jankowski, 1996; Tyler, 1990). The current study utilized a social domain framework (Turiel, 1983) to examine the structure of adolescents' beliefs about laws, and tested whether beliefs about government regulation (importance of laws, obligation to obey authority, and deserved punishment) are associated with specific categories of delinquent behavior.

Laws serve a variety of purposes including preventing harm to others (e.g., assault), preventing harm to oneself (e.g., seatbelt use), and coordinating effective social functioning (e.g., parking restrictions). Forming beliefs about the purpose and function of different laws is a central component of civic development (Flanagan, 2013). In democratic countries, citizens can directly contribute to the creation or modification of laws by petitioning or voting for different legislature (Gamble, 1997). Additionally, debates over the acceptability of behaviors that pose risks to the health of individuals and communities have been issues of popular political discourse in the United States. Recent examples include discussions over the legal age of alcohol consumption and prohibitions against smoking in restaurants and public buildings. Thus, beliefs about whether certain actions should be subject to government regulation or a matter of personal choice have important implications for political discourse and civic action. Examining the structure of youths' beliefs about laws may help researchers better understand the developmental processes that are involved in adolescent civic and political engagement.

Social Domain Theory and Concepts of Authority

Developmental scholars have utilized social domain theory to examine adolescents' emerging beliefs about government and community engagement (Helwig, 1995; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Similarly, social domain theory provides a useful theoretical framework for examining and categorizing

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adolescents' beliefs about different types of laws. According to social domain theory, individuals judge and reason about social information including behaviors and rules from different domains of social knowledge (e.g., moral, conventional, personal, or prudential; Turiel, 1983). The *moral* domain pertains to issues that concern the welfare of others, justice, and rights (e.g., hitting a peer). Moral issues are obligatory, unalterable, and universally applicable (not contingent on social rules or authority). In contrast, *conventional* concepts are alterable, arbitrary, agreed-upon regulations that are dependent on authority and used to govern social interactions within specific contexts (e.g., eating with elbows on the table). The *personal* domain pertains to matters of personal preference, and is not subject to moral or conventional authority; these issues are not a matter of right or wrong or subject to regulation, but up to the individual (e.g., friendships choices). *Prudential* issues also concern matters of the self, but in the context of prudence or self-harm (e.g., a child purposefully jumping off a swing). Some issues are *multifaceted* and may entail several different features relevant to multiple domains of social knowledge which leads individuals to interpret the action from different domains. For instance, problem peer friendships may be viewed as an issue of personal choice by teens, yet viewed as a prudential concern by parents (due to the harm that may result from these associations).

To date, a great deal of research has focused on adolescents' domain-specific reasoning concerning rules established by proximal authority figures, such as parents (Smetana, 1988, 1995; Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Tisak, 1986; Yau, Smetana, & Metzger, 2009) and teachers (Smetana & Bitz, 1996). Less research has examined adolescents' domain-specific reasoning about different laws established and enforced by more distal authority figures, such as governmental institutions. Generally, most teenagers view parents and teachers as having legitimate authority to regulate and enforce rules concerning moral, conventional, and prudential behaviors (Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Smetana & Bitz, 1996). Most adolescents also believe that they have a strong obligation to obey parent- and teacher-enforced moral rules (even if they do not agree with them) and view parents and teachers as having an obligation to establish restricting moral violations (Smetana, 1995; Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Smetana & Bitz, 1996). However, youth often judge personal issues as beyond parental and teacher jurisdiction and a matter of their

own prerogative (Smetana, 1988; Smetana & Bitz, 1996).

With age and increased autonomy, adolescents view a wider range of issues once considered conventional or prudential as personal matters (Smetana & Asquith, 1994) while also experiencing greater exposure to social institutions (Flanagan & Faison, 2002). The co-occurrence of expanding beliefs about personal autonomy and more frequent contact with civic systems may prompt evaluations of laws and boundaries of government authority. Some evidence suggests that adolescents view government as a legitimate authority over moral, conventional, and prudential issues but not personal issues (Helwig & Jasiobedzka, 2001; Nucci, Guerra, & Lee, 1991; Tisak & Jankowski, 1996). However, this research has focused on adolescents' beliefs about drug use, laws that explicitly conflict with personal freedom (e.g., mandatory flu shots), or rules typically governed by parents or teachers within school and family contexts (e.g., misbehaving, talking back, calling an authority by his/her formal name; Crane-Ross, Tisak, & Tisak, 1998; Tisak & Jankowski, 1996). Research has not comprehensively examined adolescents' domain-specific judgments and justifications about a wider array of issues that are typically enforced by government representatives (not parents or teachers) and have broader community implications (e.g., registering one's car, parking, zoning). Examining the structure of adolescents' beliefs about these laws may provide important insight into youths' understanding of the limitations, boundaries, and functions of government. Beliefs about role and responsibility of government represent key elements of the "social contract" (Flanagan, 2013), are prominent within civic and political discussions, and when acted upon, may shape public policy. Thus, investigating youths' concepts of laws typically regulated by government authority may elucidate an important component of adolescents' civic understanding and contribute to scholarship on civic development.

Methodological Considerations When Assessing Beliefs About Laws

Assessing adolescents' beliefs about laws poses certain methodological challenges. Previous research has demonstrated that youth consider multiple elements of rules in their evaluations of laws, such as their utility and social benefit, potential impediments to personal rights, and the specific setting where the transgression occurred (Helwig, 1997;

Helwig & Jasiobedzka, 2001). Thus, beliefs about laws may be highly dependent on the context of the transgression. For example, in the United States, drinking alcohol after a specific age is typically permitted within licensed establishments or private residences but illegal in public places. To assess adolescents' social understanding of laws free of contextual idiosyncrasies, previous research on social groups and parents' rules has utilized detailed vignettes (Horn, 2003; Lagattuta, Nucci, & Bosacki, 2010). Using detailed vignettes allows scholars to contextualize specific types of transgressions while eliminating nonessential information, and thus vignettes may provide a more accurate assessment of adolescents' beliefs about laws.

Traditionally, domain specificity in social understanding is established through criterion judgments which assess principles of obligation and whether individuals believe rules must be followed independent of authority or regulation. After providing these judgments, researchers ask participants to give justifications for the rightness/wrongness of an act (see Smetana, 2006 for a review). Moral issues are viewed as obligatory and wrong independent of authority. Conventional issues are viewed as wrong contingent on authority, and personal issues are viewed as up to the individual to decide. Social domain research has also assessed additional dimensions of adolescents' reasoning about different behaviors, including ratings of whether different rules are important (*importance* judgments), obligatory to obey (*obedience* judgments), and worthy of punishment (*punishment* judgments). These assessments have been typically used in research examining adolescents' beliefs about rules established by parents, and have been shown to follow domain-specific patterns (Smetana et al., 2012; Tisak & Turiel, 1988). While research has examined similar judgments concerning laws within adult samples (Robinson, Kurzban, & Jones, 2007), scholars have not yet examined adolescents' importance, obedience, and punishment judgments for laws hypothesized to regulate domain-specific issues. Utilizing an array of domain-consistent judgments may provide a more comprehensive assessment of adolescents' beliefs about laws, and potentially allow for the examination of individual variability in these beliefs.

Associations Among Beliefs About Laws and Delinquency

Although social domain theory posits normative distinctions among laws thought to regulate

domain-consistent issues, some evidence suggests that there is substantial interindividual variability in beliefs about different types of government regulations (Altemeyer, 1996). Social-cognitive models posit that social understanding is bidirectionally tied to personal experience and behavior (Turiel, 1983). Previous research examining children's and adolescents' beliefs about aggressive behaviors and engagement in different forms of misconduct at school has shown domain-consistent associations among teens' judgments and behavior (Crane-Ross et al., 1998; Smetana & Bitz, 1996). Comparable trends have been found with adolescents' beliefs and behaviors concerning civic engagement and drug use (Metzger & Smetana, 2009; Nucci et al., 1991). Adolescents that have engaged in different types of delinquent and lawbreaking behavior may be more inclined to view these issues as matters of their own prerogative and judge laws regulating them as less important, obligatory to obey, and transgressions worthy of less punishment. Similarly, youth that view certain laws as more important and obligatory to obey may be less inclined to engage in behaviors that violate similar laws. Examining associations among adolescents' beliefs about domain-specific laws and engagement in lawbreaking behavior may provide important insight into the potential antecedents and social implications of adolescents' emerging beliefs about government.

The Current Study

The current study had two aims. The first aim was to apply a social domain framework to adolescents' beliefs about laws. Specifically, we examined whether adolescents' domain-criterion judgments and justifications as well as their ratings of the importance, obligation to obey, and deserved punishment, followed domain-specific patterns for laws that regulate moral, prudential, conventional, personal, and multifaceted issues. Based on research examining adolescents' domain-beliefs about parental rules (Smetana & Bitz, 1996; Smetana et al., 2012; Tisak & Turiel, 1988), it was hypothesized that youth would view government as a legitimate authority over nonpersonal issues, and view that government has an obligation to create laws restricting moral issues. It was also hypothesized that adolescents would view moral issues as wrong regardless of rule contingency, conventional issues as wrong contingent on government regulation, and personal issues as not a matter of right or wrong but up to the individual.

Additionally, it was hypothesized that adolescents would rate laws regulating moral and prudential issues as most important, obligatory to obey, and transgressions worthy of greater punishment.

The second aim was to examine whether adolescents' beliefs about laws were associated with their engagement in delinquent activities regulated by those same laws. Based on previous research (Crane-Ross et al., 1998; Nucci et al., 1991), it was hypothesized that adolescents' engagement in domain-consistent types of delinquency would be associated with less supportive beliefs about laws regarding similar issues.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 340 students (58.2% female) in Grades 9–12 (ages 13–20 years, $M = 16.64$, $SD = 1.37$) from a high school in a midsized mid-Atlantic city. School report data indicates that 27% of the students at the high school received free or reduced lunch. The sample was primarily White/Caucasian ($n = 250$, 73.6%), and the remaining were African American/Black ($n = 18$, 5.9%), Asian American/Pacific Islander ($n = 12$, 4.0%), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 6$, 2.0%), other ($n = 11$, 3.6%), or biracial ($n = 37$, 10.9%). The racial/ethnic composition of the sample was similar to the high school from which it was drawn (Propublica, 2015). All participants indicated that they were U.S. citizens.

Procedure

All adolescents enrolled in social studies classes were eligible to participate (approximately $N = 800$; participation rate of 42.5%). Adolescents under 18 were given parental consent forms in their social studies classrooms to be completed by their parent/legal guardian prior to participation in the study. For those who were granted parental consent, group-based informed assent was administered within each classroom by trained research assistants. Adolescents who were 18 years or older gave informed consent. Participants completed a survey during scheduled social studies class periods. All participating adolescents were eligible for randomly drawn cash prizes and gift cards ranging in value from \$10 to \$100.

Measures

Vignettes. Similar to previous research on adolescents' evaluations of social group exclusion

(Horn, 2003), domain-specific beliefs about laws were assessed through responses to written vignettes depicting different transgressions. Four focus groups were held with a total of $N = 20$ youth (approximately $n = 5$ youth per group, ages 15–18 years) that entailed a discussion of the function and purpose of different types of laws. From these discussions, 20 vignettes were created depicting individuals violating different types of laws hypothesized to regulate moral, prudential, conventional, personal, and multifaceted issues. Cognitive interviews with 20 youth were conducted that focused on comprehension, interpretation, and feasibility of administering vignettes within a class period. Based on feedback from these cognitive interviews, 14 vignettes depicting moral (3 vignettes; e.g., stealing money), drug-related prudential (2 vignettes; e.g., using drugs), conventional (3 vignettes; e.g., fishing without a license), personal (3 vignettes; e.g., joining out-of-school activities), and personal/conventional multifaceted issues (3 vignettes; e.g., zoning laws) were selected and administered (see Table 1 for vignette wording). To ensure responses were not biased by gender stereotyping, gender-neutral names were used in all vignettes.

Domain-criterion judgments and justifications. After reading each vignette and following previous research (Smetana & Asquith, 1994), participants rated a series of domain-criterion judgments meant to capture conceptual distinctions between different domains. These judgments included beliefs about the legitimacy of laws, obligation of authority to make laws, and whether the act was permissible when authorized by authority. Legitimacy judgments assessed whether an act was justifiably regulated by an authority figure, a key dimension distinguishing nonpersonal issues from personal issues. Judgments concerning whether authorities had an obligation to create a law assessed principles of obligation, an important criterion for morality that distinguishes moral issues from nonmoral issues (Smetana, 2006). Authority contingency judgments assessed the degree to which the behavior is acceptable in the absence of authority mandate, which distinguishes conventional issues from moral and prudential issues. Youth also provided justification for the rightness/wrongness of the act, which assessed domain-specific understanding. Justifications that reference harm to others or fairness indicate moral reasoning, justifications that reference personal harm indicate prudential reasoning, justifications that reference

TABLE 1
Vignette Categories and Descriptions

Moral	
Stealing	Morgan lives in state that has laws about stealing. Morgan takes money out of a stranger's purse when they are not looking.
Fighting	Jessie lives in a state that has laws against physically hurting another person. Jessie gets into a fist fight with a neighborhood kid for no reason.
Vandalism	Alex lives in a state that has laws against vandalism. A new recreational building is built in Alex's community. Late at night, Alex spray paints graffiti on the side of the newly built community building.
Drug-related prudential	
Cocaine	Avery lives in a state that has laws against using drugs. Avery is offered cocaine at a party. Avery has never tried cocaine before, and decides to use it.
Prescription pills	Riley lives in state that has laws against using prescription pain killers not meant for you. A friend offers Riley prescription pain killers. Riley is not experiencing any pain. Riley's friend says that they "just feel good." Riley takes the pain killers to get that "good feeling."
Conventional	
Parking	Taylor drives into an empty parking lot of a state-owned building and parks next to a sign that clearly states "No parking without permit."
Car registration	Ryan lives in a state that requires all cars to be registered at the Department of Motor Vehicles each year. Ryan's car was registered when it was purchased. However, Ryan did not renew the registration when it expired. Ryan drives to the convenience store with an expired registration.
Fishing license	Sam goes fishing at a state-owned pond without buying a fishing license. At this pond, there is a sign that clearly states "All fishermen must have valid fishing license."
Personal	
Out-of-school activities	Jamie lives in a state that requires all high school kids to join out-of-school activities every year. Jamie did not sign up for any activities.
Job	Casey's state requires teenagers to get a job at the age of 16. Casey's family can easily pay their bills. Casey decides not to get a job, and instead spends free time with friends.
Clothes	Jordan lives in a state that doesn't allow teenagers to wear baggy pants in public. Jordan walked to the store wearing a baggy shirt and shorts.
Personal/conventional multifaceted	
Park	Parker is walking home at midnight talking with a couple of friends. They enter an empty park and walk past a sign that says "closed at sundown" and continue to talk.
Loitering	Sam and Corey live in a community that doesn't allow teenagers to loiter (hang around) outside of local businesses. Sam and Corey talk outside of the convenience store for a couple of hours in front of a sign that says "No loitering."
Zoning	Jamie owns a house in a community that does not allow above-ground swimming pools. Jamie decides to install an above-ground swimming pool.

structure, order, or punishment indicate conventional reasoning, and those that reference personal choice indicate personal reasoning (Smetana, 2006).

Legitimacy of laws. After reading each vignette, participants provided forced-choice dichotomous (yes/no) self-report ratings concerning whether it was OKAY for government to make a law restricting the described behavior. Response indicating *legitimacy* (whether the law is viewed as OKAY) were assigned a score of 1, and responses indicating that it was not legitimate for government to enact a law were assigned a score of 0.

Obligation of authority to make law. Participants provided forced-choice dichotomous (yes/no) self-report ratings concerning whether government has an obligation to make a law restricting the given behavior. Responses indicating government *obligation to create law* were assigned a score of 1, and

responses indicating no obligation were given a score of 0.

Authority contingency and independence. Participants provided forced-choice self-report ratings concerning whether the permissibility of the act is contingent on authority by indicating whether the act is "Always wrong whether or not those in government say so" (independent of authority), "Wrong only if those in government say so" (contingent on authority), or "Not an issue of right or wrong—up to the individual" (personal).

Justifications. Similar to previous research (Nucci et al., 1991), domain-specific justifications were assessed by having participants provide self-report ratings indicating which of the following reasons most closely fit their beliefs about why it was OKAY or NOT OKAY for laws to restrict each behavior. Categorical response options included "It

is harmful to others or unfair" (moral), "It could harm yourself" (prudential), "It is important to have order, it is impolite, or you might get in trouble" (conventional), and "There is nothing wrong with it, it's okay because it doesn't affect other people" (personal).

Additional domain-consistent judgments. In addition to the domain-criterion judgments, participants also rated a series of domain-consistent judgments concerning the importance, obligation to obey, and deserved punishment for violating the laws depicted in the vignettes. For each judgment, mean scale scores were calculated by averaging across items within the same domain. Corrected item-total correlations (ITC) for each scale are presented in Table 2 and indicated acceptable (ITC > .30; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) internal consistency for most items.

Importance judgments. On the basis of previous research (Tisak & Turiel, 1988), participants rated the degree to which laws regulating the 14 situations described in the vignettes were important on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). Higher ratings indicated stronger beliefs that laws restricting that behavior are important.

Obedience judgments. Participants indicated the degree to which people have to follow each of the

14 laws depicted in the vignettes, even if they did not agree with them on a 5-point scale from 1 (*don't have to*) to 5 (*definitely have to*). Higher ratings indicated stronger obedience beliefs.

Punishment judgments. Consistent with previous research (Tisak & Turiel, 1988) participants indicated how much punishment people should receive for violating laws depicted in each of the 14 vignettes on a 5-point scale from 1 (*no punishment*) to 5 (*a lot of punishment*). Higher ratings indicated stronger punishment beliefs.

Delinquency. Participants rated the frequency at which they engaged in 10 of the 11 nonpersonal delinquent behaviors depicted in the vignettes over the past 30 days. Pilot testing indicated that very few youth had violated zoning laws (multifaceted issue); thus, these ratings were not included. Responses were given on a 5-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Due to extremely low frequencies across all items, responses were dichotomized such that 0 = *did not violate law within a given domain*, and 1 = *violated a law within a given domain*.¹

Data Analytic Plan

The first aim of this study was to examine whether adolescents' judgments and justifications followed domain-specific patterns for laws that regulate moral, prudential, conventional, personal, and multifaceted issues. First, we provide an overview of the average response ratings across items within each domain for each judgment. The purpose of this initial overview was to describe whether youths' beliefs about the legitimacy of laws, obligation for authority to create laws, authority contingency, and justifications followed domain-consistent patterns. Next, repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to formally test mean differences in youths' authority contingency domain judgments and justifications. Proportion scores were calculated for authority contingency judgments representing the proportion of issues within each domain rated as wrong independent of authority, wrong contingent on authority, and under personal jurisdiction. Similarly, proportion scores were created for adolescents' justifications of the wrongness/rightness of an act

TABLE 2
Corrected Item-Total Correlations Among Items Comprising the Importance, Obedience, and Punishment Scales

Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlations		
	Importance	Obedience	Punishment
Moral			
Stealing	.43	.71	.47
Fighting	.20	.54	.26
Vandalism	.32	.72	.47
Drug-related prudential			
Cocaine	.55	.80	.62
Prescription pills	.55	.80	.62
Conventional			
Parking	.47	.67	.45
Car registration	.45	.57	.48
Fishing license	.38	.64	.34
Personal			
Out-of-school activities	.31	.87	.55
Job	.30	.74	.40
Clothes	.30	.79	.40
Personal/conventional multifaceted			
Park	.49	.75	.48
Loitering	.42	.70	.43
Zoning	.32	.64	.30

Note. Values represent correlations among a given item with the mean total score for the remaining items in the scale.

¹We replicated our final analytic model using continuous indices of delinquency and maximum likelihood with robust standard error (MLR) estimation and found an identical pattern of significant effects.

across domains. A series of repeated-measures ANOVAs were estimated with domain specified as the repeated variable and proportion scores for each judgment and justification category specified as the outcome. Post hoc comparisons of significant mean differences in proportion scores for each set of ANOVAs were conducted using a Bonferroni-corrected *t*-test for within-subject effects.

Structural equation modeling was used to examine associations among nonpersonal domain-consistent beliefs about laws and engagement in similar forms of delinquency. Adolescents' importance, obedience, and punishment judgments for each domain were specified as indicators of four endogenous latent variables that encapsulated youths' beliefs about laws that regulate moral, drug-related prudential, conventional, and multifaceted issues, respectively. To account for potential engagement in multiple forms of delinquency, observed scores for moral, drug-related prudential, conventional, and multifaceted delinquency were entered in the model as exogenous variables and adolescents' age, gender, and ethnicity were entered as covariates. Further, measurement error terms for similar indicators of the latent variables (importance, obedience, and punishment) were allowed to covary to account for shared method variance. Covariances were also specified among the delinquency measures.

Nested and nonnested model comparisons were used to test alternative theoretical models for the associations among engagement in domain-specific forms of delinquency and beliefs about laws. Specifically, a nested comparison was used to test whether a model in which only domain-consistent pathways were estimated and domain-inconsistent pathways were constrained to zero (i.e., "domain-consistent" model; Figure 1a) provided a similar fit to the data compared to the overall model (all structural pathways estimated). Support for domain-consistency was indicated by a nonsignificant $\Delta\chi^2$ test and a change in comparative fit index (ΔCFI) < .01 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), which suggested that constraining the domain-inconsistent pathways to zero did not cumulatively account for a meaningful amount of variance in the model. Next, an additional nested comparison was used to test whether a model in which only domain-inconsistent pathways were estimated and domain-consistent pathways were constrained to zero (i.e., "domain inconsistent" model; Figure 1b) provided a similar fit to the data compared to the overall model. Support for domain consistency was indicated by a significant $\Delta\chi^2$ test and a ΔCFI > .01, which suggested that constraining the domain consistent pathways to zero cumulatively accounted for a meaningful amount of variance in the model. A final nonnested model comparison was used to

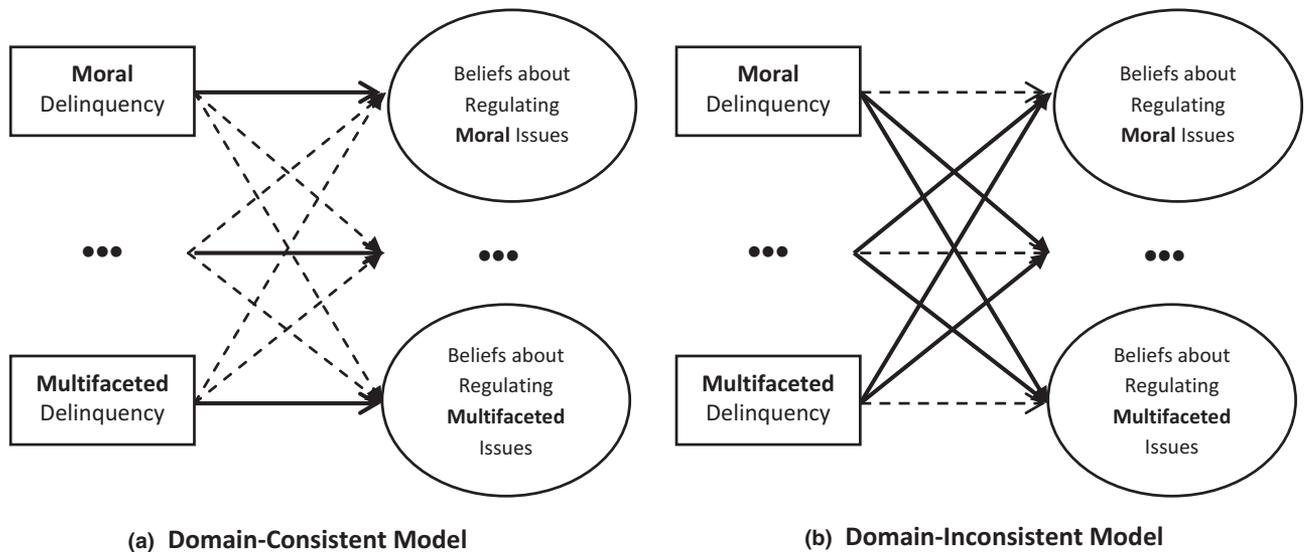


FIGURE 1 Alternative conceptual models used in model fit comparisons. *Notes.* (a) A model where only domain-consistent pathways between behaviors and beliefs were estimated and domain-inconsistent pathways were constrained to zero. (b) A model where only domain-inconsistent pathways were estimated and domain-consistent pathways were constrained to zero. Solid lines represent estimated pathways; dashed lines represent constrained pathways. For simplicity, only moral and multifaceted issues are displayed, with the three dots representing similar patterns for conventional and drug-related prudential issues.

test whether the domain-consistent model (Figure 1a) provided a better fit to the data compared to the domain-inconsistent model (Figure 1b), as indicated by a change in Akaike information criterion (ΔAIC) > 7 (Burnham, Anderson, & Huyvaert, 2011) and a change in Bayesian information criterion (ΔBIC) score > 5 (Raftery, 1995).

RESULTS

Domain Specificity in Beliefs About Laws

Mean percentages of youths' legitimacy judgments, obligation judgments, authority contingency judgments, and justifications for domain-specific issues are displayed in Table 3. The majority of youth viewed government regulation of moral, drug-related prudential, and conventional issues as legitimate, and of personal issues as illegitimate. Additionally, most youth believed that government had an obligation to create laws regulating moral and drug-related prudential issues, and viewed these issues as wrong independent of authority. The majority of teens believed that government had an obligation to regulate conventional issues and thought these issues were wrong contingent on authority. Youth did not believe that government had an obligation to regulate personal issues and judged these matters as up to the individual. Justifications for judgments about laws also followed domain-specific patterns, with the majority of youth indicating that violations of laws regulating moral issues were wrong because of potential harm to others or fairness concerns, violations of laws regulating drug-related prudential issues were viewed as wrong because they entail harm to the self, violations of laws regulating conventional

issues were wrong because of disruptions to structure and order, and violations of laws regulating personal issues were not viewed as wrong because they are up to the individual. Notably, some youth applied harm to others and fairness justifications for violations of laws regulating conventional issues.

To examine mean differences in youths' ratings across domains, separate repeated-measures ANOVAs were conducted with domain specified as the repeated variable and proportion scores for authority contingency responses (independent of authority, contingent on authority, personal), proportion scores for justifications (moral, drug-related prudential, conventional, personal), and mean scores for domain-consistent judgments (importance, obedience, punishment) specified as the dependent variable. Post hoc comparisons were conducted using a Bonferroni-corrected *t*-test for within-subject effects. Means, standard errors, main effects, and effect sizes for all models are displayed in Table 4. Adolescents viewed a greater proportion of moral and drug-related prudential issues as wrong independent of authority compared to conventional, personal, and personal/conventional multifaceted issues. Teens ascribed authority contingent judgments to a greater proportion of conventional issues compared to all other domains and viewed that a greater proportion of personal issues were a matter of one's own prerogative. Additionally, compared to moral, drug-related prudential, and personal issues (but not conventional issues) youth viewed a proportionally greater number of multifaceted issues as wrong contingent on authority, and compared to moral, drug-related prudential, and conventional issues (but not personal issues), youth viewed a proportionally greater number of multifaceted issues as up to the individual.

TABLE 3
Mean Judgments in % of Legitimacy, Obligation, Authority Contingency, and Justifications

	<i>Moral</i>	<i>Prudential-Drug</i>	<i>Conventional</i>	<i>Personal</i>	<i>Multifaceted</i>
Legitimacy	92.5	93.1	85.9	8.2	51.9
Obligation	75.7	74.3	55.4	4.2	22.2
Auth. contingency					
Not contingent	75.5	72.9	36.7	2.1	10.5
Contingent	9.2	7.3	42.8	4.7	34.8
Personal	15.4	19.7	20.5	93.2	54.6
Justification					
Moral	68.8	9.2	33.4	2.6	2.2
Conventional	20.9	3.5	42.4	3.2	44.5
Personal	3.7	2.8	15.8	91.9	51.0
Prudential	6.6	84.2	8.4	2.3	2.3

Note. Values represent the mean percentage of a given response for laws regulating domain-specific issues. Response options for categorical ratings are listed under the specific judgment. Auth. = Authority.

TABLE 4
Within-Subject ANOVAs Comparing Proportion of Judgments Across Domain

	<i>Moral</i>		<i>Prudential-Drug</i>		<i>Conventional</i>		<i>Personal</i>		<i>Multifaceted</i>		<i>Main Effects</i> <i>df = (4, 335)</i>	η_p^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>		
Auth. contingency												
Not contingent	0.75 _a	.02	0.73 _a	.02	0.37 _b	.02	0.02 _c	.01	0.11 _d	.01	465.45***	.58
Contingent	0.09 _a	.01	0.07 _a	.01	0.43 _b	.02	0.05 _a	.01	0.35 _c	.02	154.18***	.31
Up to the individual	0.15 _a	.01	0.19 _{a,b}	.02	0.21 _b	.02	0.93 _c	.01	0.55 _d	.02	452.90***	.57
Justifications												
Moral	0.68 _a	.02	0.09 _b	.01	0.33 _c	.02	0.03 _d	.01	0.14 _{b,d}	.02	347.89***	.51
Prudential	0.06 _a	.01	0.84 _b	.02	0.16 _c	.01	0.03 _a	.01	0.14 _c	.02	835.88***	.71
Personal	0.04 _a	.01	0.03 _a	.01	0.16 _b	.01	0.91 _c	.01	0.53 _d	.01	1050.63***	.76
Conventional	0.21 _a	.01	0.02 _b	.01	0.42 _c	.02	0.04 _b	.01	0.30 _d	.02	204.35***	.38
Additional ratings												
Importance	4.21 _a	.04	4.19 _a	.05	2.66 _b	.04	1.31 _c	.03	1.83 _d	.04	1602.29***	.83
Obligation to Obey	4.09 _a	.05	4.19 _a	.06	3.31 _b	.06	2.11 _c	.07	2.59 _d	.07	410.03***	.55
Punishment	3.46 _a	.04	3.94 _b	.06	2.48 _c	.04	1.29 _d	.03	1.78 _e	.04	881.25***	.72

Notes. Means with different subscripts significantly differ from one another. Auth. = Authority.
****p* < .001.

An examination of adolescents' justifications indicates that youth applied moral justifications to a proportionally greater number of moral issues compared to other domains. Conventional justifications were applied to a proportionally greater number of conventional issues compared to all other issues. Personal justifications were applied to a proportionally greater number of personal issues, and prudential justifications were applied to a proportionally greater number of drug-related prudential issues. Compared to moral, drug-related prudential, and personal issues (but not conventional issues), a proportionally greater number of multifaceted issues were ascribed conventional justifications. Additionally, compared to moral, drug-related prudential, and conventional issues (but not personal issues), a proportionally greater number of multifaceted laws were ascribed personal justifications, indicating that youth view these laws as containing both personal and conventional components.

When examining adolescent importance, obedience, and punishment judgments, moral and drug-related prudential issues were rated as more important and requiring greater levels of obedience compared to conventional, personal, and multifaceted issues. Laws regulating conventional issues were viewed as more important and obligatory to obey than laws regulating personal and multifaceted issues and laws regulating multifaceted issues were more important and obligatory to obey than laws regulating personal issues. Youth viewed

violations of drug-related prudential laws as worthy of more punishment than all other issues, followed by violations of laws regulating moral issues, conventional issues, multifaceted issues, and personal issues.

Domain-Specific Associations Among Beliefs About Laws and Delinquency

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for importance, obedience, and punishment judgments about laws and delinquency are displayed in Table 5. Compared to White participants, non-White participants endorsed greater importance and punishment ratings for laws regulating conventional issues, greater importance ratings for laws regulating personal issues, and lower obedience ratings for laws regulating moral issues, and were less engaged in drug-related prudential forms of delinquency. In general, importance, obedience, and punishment judgments seemed more strongly correlated within domain than across domain. Adolescents that engaged in moral, drug-related prudential, and multifaceted forms of delinquency endorsed lower importance, obedience, and punishment judgment concerning similar issues.

A structural model was estimated with domain-specific delinquency (moral, drug-related prudential, conventional, multifaceted) specified as predictors of four latent variables representing beliefs about moral, drug-related prudential, conventional, and multifaceted laws controlling for

TABLE 5
Domain-Specific Correlations Among Judgments About Laws and Delinquency

	M	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	(N)	(%)																					
1. Age	—	—	.51**	-.09	-.05	-.06	.03	.03	-.08	-.01	-.01	-.03	-.06	.07	.01	.03	.00	-.03	-.02	-.03	.05	-.06	.09
2. Gender	—	—	-.16**	-.16**	.02	-.06	.03	-.04	-.09	.02	-.05	-.05	.00	.07	-.03	.10	.07	.00	.01	-.04	.09	.03	.04
3. Race/Ethnicity	—	—	—	-.10	.16**	-.06	-.06	.04	.17**	.09	-.13*	-.05	-.12*	-.18**	-.05	-.04	-.09	.00	-.03	-.06	-.14*	.08	-.03
Moral																							
4. Importance	4.20	0.71				.26**	.54**	.30**	.17**	.21**	.30**	.19**	.10	.03	.13*	.01	.31**	.24**	.23**	-.11*	-.07	-.11*	-.12*
5. Obedience	4.09	0.99				.29**	.11*	.11*	.63**	.18**	.07	.43**	.05	-.19**	.07	-.09	.00	.29**	.00	-.12*	-.09	-.06	-.08
6. Punishment	3.46	0.69					.25**	.15**	.15**	.28**	.32**	.20**	.31**	.09	.13*	.16**	.34**	.23**	.40**	-.16**	-.09	-.10	-.10
Prudential-Drug																							
7. Importance	4.18	0.76							.51**	.80**	.36**	.24**	.27**	.24**	.15**	.10	.39**	.26**	.36**	-.17**	-.34**	-.16**	-.21**
8. Obedience	4.27	0.93							.61**	.18**	.45**	.17**	.17**	.01	.17**	-.03	.13*	.40**	.13*	-.12*	-.31**	-.14*	-.20**
9. Punishment	3.82	0.90							.37**	.29**	.36**	.29**	.36**	.20**	.19**	.08	.30**	.31**	.36**	-.17**	-.41**	-.18**	-.21**
Conventional																							
10. Importance	2.66	0.78							.50**	.69**	.28**	.69**	.27**	.28**	.23**	.21**	.58**	.35**	.51**	-.08	-.07	-.08	-.09
11. Obedience	3.31	1.05							.53**	.57**	.07	.53**	.17**	.07	.57**	.10	.25**	.76**	.29**	-.01	-.11	-.10	-.11*
12. Punishment	2.48	0.71									.20**	.22**	.36**	.20**	.28**	.28**	.41**	.33**	.53**	-.06	-.09	-.04	-.11*
Personal																							
13. Importance	1.31	0.50													.25**	.40**	.38**	.12*	.33**	.00	-.04	.03	.02
14. Obedience	2.10	1.29													.40**	.40**	.14**	.70**	.28**	.03	-.10	-.05	-.09
15. Punishment	1.28	0.51														.24**	.24**	.19**	.42**	.05	-.01	.03	.09
Multifaceted																							
16. Importance	1.83	0.70															.42**	.42**	.70**	-.06	-.06	-.07	-.17**
17. Obedience	2.58	1.20																	.47**	-.01	-.10	-.11*	-.21**
18. Punishment	1.78	0.69																		-.02	-.13*	-.08	-.18**
Delinquency																							
19. Moral	(38)	(11.2)																			.26**	.21**	.31**
20. Prudential-Drug	(48)	(14.1)																				.23**	.40**
21. Conventional	(103)	(30.5)																					
22. Multifaceted	(92)	(27.2)																					

Notes. Gender is coded as 1 = male, 2 = female. Race/Ethnicity is coded as 1 = White, 2 = non-White.
p* < .05; *p* < .01.

TABLE 6
Associations Among Domain-Specific Forms of Delinquency and Beliefs About Laws

	Regulation Over Moral Issues			Regulation Over Prudential-Drug Issues			Regulation Over Conventional Issues			Regulation Over Multifaceted Issues		
	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE
Covariates												
Age	.03	.02	.04	.00	0.00	.04	.01	.00	.05	.03	.02	.04
Gender	-.11	-.24	.12	.07	0.14	.12	.10	.21	.12	.03	.06	.12
Race/ethnicity	.09	-.22	.14	.03	0.09	.14	-.16**	-.39	.14	-.06	-.15	.13
Delinquency												
Moral	-.17*	-.54	.23	-.05	-0.17	.22	-.02	-.06	.21	.04	.13	.21
Prudential-drug	-.05	-.16	.19	-.35***	-1.11	.21	-.08	-.25	.18	-.06	-.19	.16
Conventional	-.09	-.20	.14	-.07	-0.17	.14	.01	.02	.14	.00	.01	.15
Multifaceted	-.02	-.05	.14	-.05	-0.13	.17	-.08	-.18	.14	-.21***	-.49	.14

Notes. Gender is coded as 1 = male, 2 = female. Race/ethnicity is coded as 1 = White, 2 = non-White.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

age, gender, and race/ethnicity. The final model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(102) = 148.6$, CFI = .98, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04. Table 6 presents standardized estimates, unstandardized estimates, and standard errors. Engagement in moral delinquency was associated with less supportive judgments about laws regulating moral issues, engagement in drug-related prudential delinquency was associated with less supportive judgments for laws regulating drug-related prudential issues, and engagement in multifaceted delinquency was associated with less supportive judgments for laws regulating multifaceted issues. Engagement in conventional forms of delinquency was not significantly associated with judgments about laws regulating conventional issues.

To further test domain specificity among delinquency and judgments, a series of model fit comparisons were conducted. First, the full structural model was compared to a model in which the domain-inconsistent structural paths were constrained to zero (leaving only the domain-consistent associations between judgments and behaviors; Figure 1a). The model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(114) = 162.35$, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .04, BIC = 11050.65, AIC = 10992.05. The chi-square difference test indicated a model estimating only domain-consistent pathways (and constraining domain-inconsistent paths to zero) provided a similar fit to the data compared to the full model, $\Delta\chi^2 = 13.75$, $\Delta df = 12$, $p = .46$, $\Delta CFI < .01$, and was more parsimonious. Next, the full structural model was compared to a model in which the domain-consistent pathways between behavior and beliefs were constrained to zero (leaving only the domain-

inconsistent associations between judgments and behaviors; Figure 1b). The model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(106) = 205.40$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .05, BIC = 11119.50, AIC = 11055.86. The chi-square difference test indicated that a model that estimated only the domain-inconsistent pathways (and constraining the domain-consistent pathways to zero) provided a significantly worse fit to the data compared to the full model, $\Delta\chi^2 = 43.05$, $\Delta df = 4$, $p < .001$, $\Delta CFI = .03$. Additionally, comparison of AIC and BIC values indicated that the domain-consistent model (Figure 1a) provided a better fit to the data than the domain-inconsistent model (Figure 1b; $\Delta AIC = 63.83$, $\Delta BIC = 68.58$). Together, these findings suggest that the domain-consistent pathways between judgments about laws and delinquency collectively accounted for a statistically meaningful amount of variance in the overall model and the domain-inconsistent pathways collectively did not account for a statistically meaningful amount of variance in the overall model. Further, when directly compared, a model that estimated only domain-consistent pathways provided a better fit to the data than a model that estimated only domain-inconsistent pathways.

DISCUSSION

Adolescence is a developmental period marked by increases in abstract reasoning and social understanding (Smetana & Villalobos, 2009). The current study examined adolescents' beliefs about laws and the role of government in regulating different types of behaviors. Consistent with social domain theory, findings from this study contribute to research on

adolescent civic development by demonstrating that teens distinguish between laws which regulate moral, drug-related prudential, conventional, and personal issues in their domain-criterion judgments and justifications. Capturing these distinctions accounted for medium to large effects in youths' traditional domain-criterion judgments, justifications, and importance, obedience, and punishment ratings (η_p^2 ranging from .31 to .83). Additionally, teens' domain-specific beliefs about laws were linked with their engagement in different forms of delinquency. Convergence between adolescents' engagement in delinquency and domain-beliefs about laws provides valuable insight into developmental processes related to youths' understanding of government and its ability to legitimately regulate different types of behaviors.

In the current study, adolescents viewed government as a legitimate authority that is obligated to create laws meant to prevent harm, indicating that youth may recognize the protective function of these types of laws. For instance, laws that were hypothesized to regulate moral issues (i.e., fighting, stealing, vandalizing community buildings) were viewed as legitimate and wrong independent of authority for reasons that concern rights, welfare, and harm to others. Similarly, laws regulating drug-related prudential issues were viewed as legitimate and wrong independent of authority, but for reasons concerning personal harm. Adolescents believed that laws regulating these moral and drug-related prudential issues were highly important, obligatory to obey, and transgression worthy of greater punishment compared to other types of issues. This pattern of findings demonstrates that the vast majority of youth supports the role of government in preventing harm to others and harm to oneself (through "hard" drug use), even when doing so imposes restrictions over certain behavior. Adolescents' willingness to forfeit personal autonomy to limit harm suggest that youths' beliefs about the relation between citizens and their governing political structures may be linked with their developing moral understanding.

Beyond harm prevention, legal scholars have also argued that certain laws are established to facilitate civic functioning (Tyler, 1990). Many teens recognized government as a legitimate authority over these conventional issues (i.e., parking, registering one's car, fishing without a license), but unlike moral issues, these laws were contingent on government authority for reasons concerning avoidance of punishment and order. Additionally, compared to youths' reasoning about laws regulat-

ing personal or personal/conventional multifaceted issues, teens recognized the social benefit of laws regulating conventional issues and rated them as more important, obligatory to obey, and worthy of greater punishment. Potentially, these findings reflect adolescents' understanding that some issues require social coordination (Turiel, 1983), and perceive government as a legitimate authority that is responsible for providing social structure (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Further, while youth may recognize the function of government to organize certain social interactions, teens were still more supportive of laws concerning welfare compared to social conventions. These findings are similar to previous research (Crane-Ross et al., 1998; Tisak & Jankowski, 1996) and suggest that issues pertaining to morality and prudence may be treated as more serious than issues concerning maintenance and order (Tisak & Turiel, 1988).

While many youth still reasoned about these issues from the conventional domain, some youth applied moral justifications to laws thought to regulate conventional issues. Post hoc analyses indicated that 40% of youth applied moral justifications to the scenario depicting an individual parking in a space that was clearly marked "no parking" (compared to 42% of youth who applied conventional justifications). Some youth may have viewed violating this parking rule as a matter of fairness, and future research is needed to further explore this finding.

Consistent with previous research (Crane-Ross et al., 1998), teens did not support government regulation over personal issues. Certain behaviors such as joining out-of-school activities, getting a job, and wearing baggy clothes in public were judged as up to the individual for reasons that concerned personal choice. Furthermore, these laws were viewed as relatively unimportant, were not obligatory to obey, and transgressions were worthy of little to no punishment. Thus, youth view some issues, especially those that do not entail welfare concerns or contribute to efficient social functioning, as beyond government control and matters of their own prerogative. It is important to note that the personal issues used in this study are similar to laws and regulations established within certain communities (e.g., mandated community service, dress code requirements; Murphy, 1990; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Although lawmakers within some contexts enact legislature restricting similar behaviors, the majority of youth judged these issues to be beyond government jurisdiction. Distinguishing between the appropriateness of laws over moral

and conventional issues but not personal issues further illustrates adolescents' nuanced understanding of government authority, and provides evidence that beliefs about regulation may be intertwined with a growing understanding of social functioning and personal autonomy.

While most youth categorized laws hypothesized to regulate moral, drug-related prudential, conventional, and personal issues in their respective domains, it was anticipated that there would be greater individual variability for laws regulating multifaceted issues. In the current study, adolescents' judgments and justifications indicated that laws concerning visiting the park after dark, loitering, and zoning may be multifaceted and entail both personal and conventional components. Whereas 51.0% of justifications for multifaceted issues were personal, 44.5% of these justifications were conventional (the remaining 4.5% were moral or prudential). For some youth, appeals to structure and order may be more relevant when evaluating the appropriateness of regulating these multifaceted issues, whereas others may be attuned to appeals of personal rights and autonomy. Social domain scholars hypothesize that one potential source of heterogeneity in domain placement of multifaceted issues may be differences in factual assumptions of a given event (Wainryb, 1991) or social groups (Horn, 2003). Similar differences may account for variability in adolescents' domain-coordination of laws that regulate multifaceted issues. For instance, youth who assume that laws are more efficacious at preventing crime may be more inclined to draw upon conventional aspects of multifaceted issues while teens that assume laws do not apply to all groups of people may be more likely to draw upon personal aspects multifaceted issues. Future research is needed to examine how beliefs about multifaceted issues intersect with adolescents' assumptions about laws and social groups.

As hypothesized, one source of variation in adolescents' beliefs about laws concerning issues across several domains was teens' engagement in the delinquent behaviors regulated by those laws. Social domain theory posits that social beliefs are largely rooted in individual experiences (Turiel, 1983). Consistent with this theory, adolescents that were more involved in moral, drug-related prudential, and multifaceted forms of delinquency were less supportive of laws regulating similar issues. Similar to prior research (Metzger & Smetana, 2009), the general magnitude of these effects was moderate (β s = $-.17$ to $-.35$). Adolescents may

draw upon their experiences with delinquent behavior when evaluating judgments about the severity of breaking laws that regulate moral, drug-related prudential, and multifaceted issues. Additionally, youth that view violations of these laws as less serious may be more inclined to engage in similar transgressions. Importantly, model comparisons further supported domain consistency among beliefs about laws and engagement in delinquency. Specifically, model fit comparisons indicated that the domain consistent model provided better fit to the data than the domain-inconsistent model and a comparable fit to the data as the full model while exhibiting greater parsimony. These findings add to the burgeoning body of evidence that suggests adolescents' beliefs about the relationship between self and society are deeply intertwined with their personal experiences and interactions within their community (Flanagan, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009; Oosterhoff, Ferris, & Metzger, 2014).

Engagement in conventional forms of delinquency was not associated with adolescents' beliefs about similar laws. Some of the conventional issues used involved actions that may be less relevant or autonomous for some adolescents (e.g., those concerning driving; Williams, Leaf, Simons-Morton, & Hartos, 2006). Decisions on whether to engage in these behaviors may be more contingent on contextual limitations (e.g., owning a car) and regulation by others (e.g., parents) which may have dampened links between beliefs and behavior for conventional laws.

Findings from the current study should be taken in light of certain limitations. Concordant data does not allow for causal inferences and longitudinal data is needed to determine temporal sequencing. Further, participants from the current study were primarily White/Caucasian and from a midsized city. Although the sample was similar to the demographic characteristics of the local community and the recruited high school, future research should examine how these findings replicate in other regions that may vary in social norms or laws. For example, youth from urban cities, rural towns, and immigrant families may have different perceptions of laws—particularly those restricting conventional issues—because conventional issues are highly contextually and culturally dependent (Turiel, 1983). Although latent variables were used to model measurement error, importance and punishment judgments for the fighting-in-public scenario had low item-total correlations. Compared to stealing and vandalism, some youth may have had difficulty

envisioning instances where fighting was unjustified and drew upon potential justifications to contextualize the event (e.g., stopping a bully), which may have resulted in a less consistent pattern of responses. Future research is needed to examine beliefs about a wider range of moral issues. Additionally, the prudential issues examined in this study exclusively concerned “hard” drug use. Many governments implement laws that restrict other types of prudential behavior (e.g., helmet and seatbelt use), and additional research is needed to test whether adolescents judge and reason about these issues from the prudential domain. Similar to previous research (Nucci et al., 1991), domain judgments and justifications for the hypothetical situations were assessed via forced-choice survey methods. Using these methods may not have allowed youth to elaborate or provide multiple justifications for their judgments. Future research could utilize semistructured interviews or free response survey methods to gain a deeper understanding of youths’ beliefs about laws.

Despite these limitations, findings from this study have important implications for theory, research, and practice. For instance, these findings contribute to research utilizing social domain theory that has examined adolescents’ reasoning about rules established by parents (Smetana, 1988, 1995; Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Tisak, 1986; Yau et al., 2009) and teachers (Smetana & Bitz, 1996) by demonstrating that similar distinctions may be found with beliefs about more distal authority figures, such as government officials. Additionally, demonstrating domain consistency in youths’ beliefs about laws provides evidence that certain political beliefs may be rooted in broader social and moral developmental processes. This research extends prior work which has shown that youth evaluate different forms of civic actions based on moral and social principles (Metzger & Smetana, 2009), and suggests similar processes may be implicated in their beliefs about government. Establishing links between beliefs about domain-specific issues and similar forms of delinquency may also have implications for youth programs targeting delinquency and recidivism. Negative beliefs about laws are theorized to be an important risk factor for engagement in delinquency (Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, & Jang, 1994). Potentially, beliefs about laws and government may be a point of intervention for teens that engage in delinquency (Loeber & Farrington, 2000). Youth programs seeking to reduce delinquency may be

particularly efficacious if they target beliefs about specific issues (rather than government, laws, or authority more broadly).

The current study contributes to research on adolescent social-cognitive development, and suggests that adolescents’ beliefs about laws are nuanced and highly contingent on the content of the rule (Helwig, 1995). By demonstrating that beliefs about laws follow domain-consistent patterns, this study provides valuable insight into the developmental processes that may underlie adolescents’ civic understanding. Additionally, findings suggest substantial coordination between adolescents’ beliefs about laws and engagement in delinquency. Coordination and domain consistency among beliefs about laws and delinquency highlights the need to further explicate how personal experiences are intertwined with civic development.

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