

Preschoolers' and Adults' Understanding of Novel Moral and Conventional Violations

Antonia F. Langenhoff^{a*}, Audun Dahl^b & Mahesh Srinivasan^a

Early Social Interaction Lab

^aUniversity of California, Berkeley, ^bUniversity of California, Santa Cruz

*afl@berkeley.edu



Background

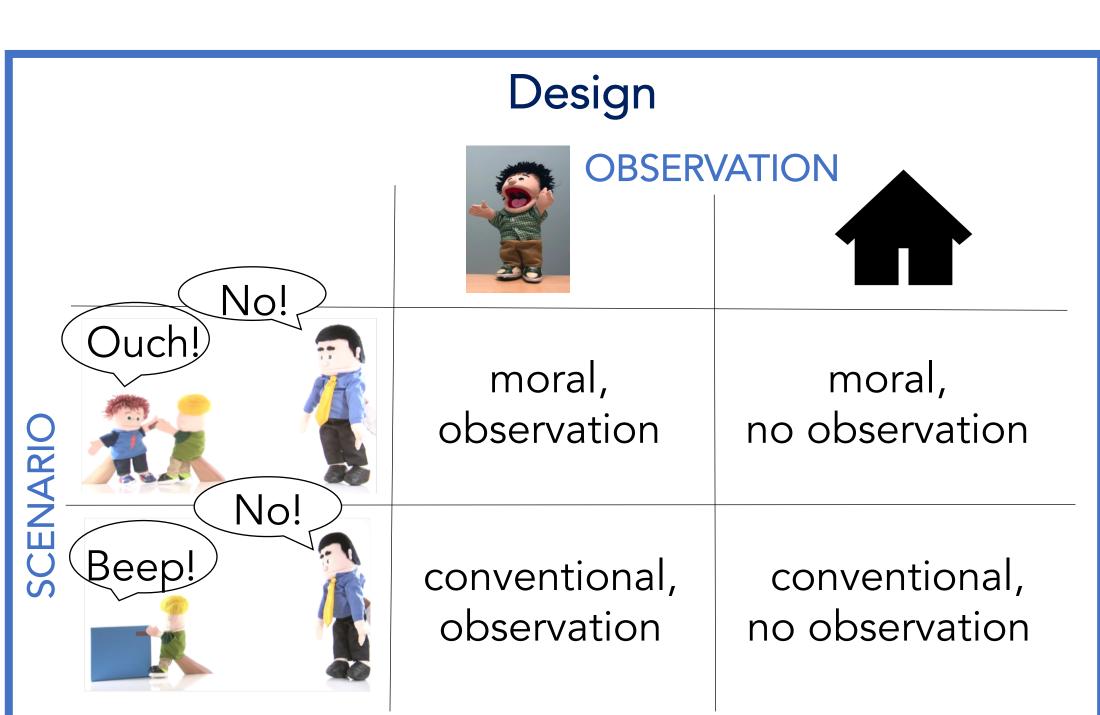
Different kinds of social norms thought to be learned from **distinct experiences**^{1,2}:

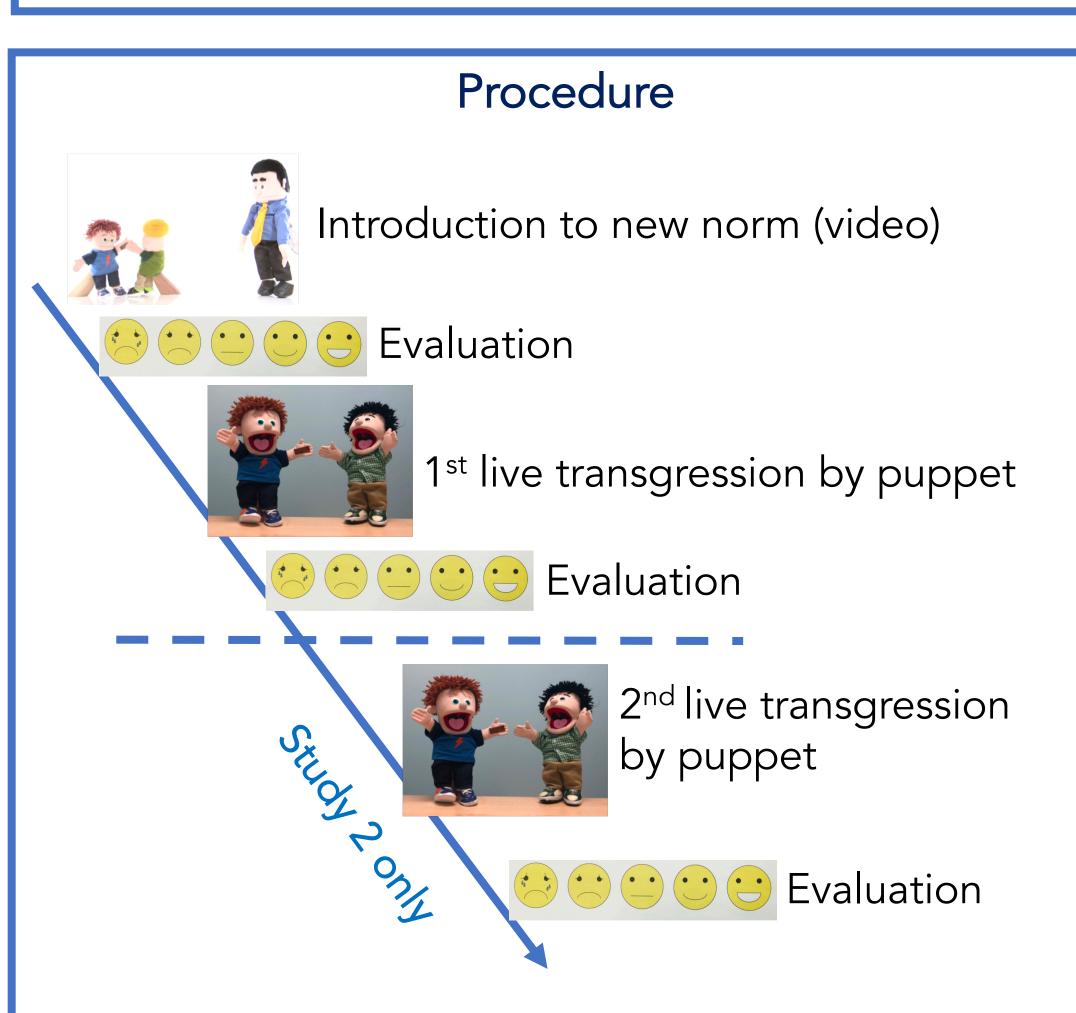
- Moral norms against physical harm from observations of how actions affect other's welfare
- Conventional norms from authority commands or by observing social consensus

Children distinguish (familiar) moral and conventional transgressions: Evidence from interview studies^{3,4} and studies using spontaneous protest⁵.

Research questions

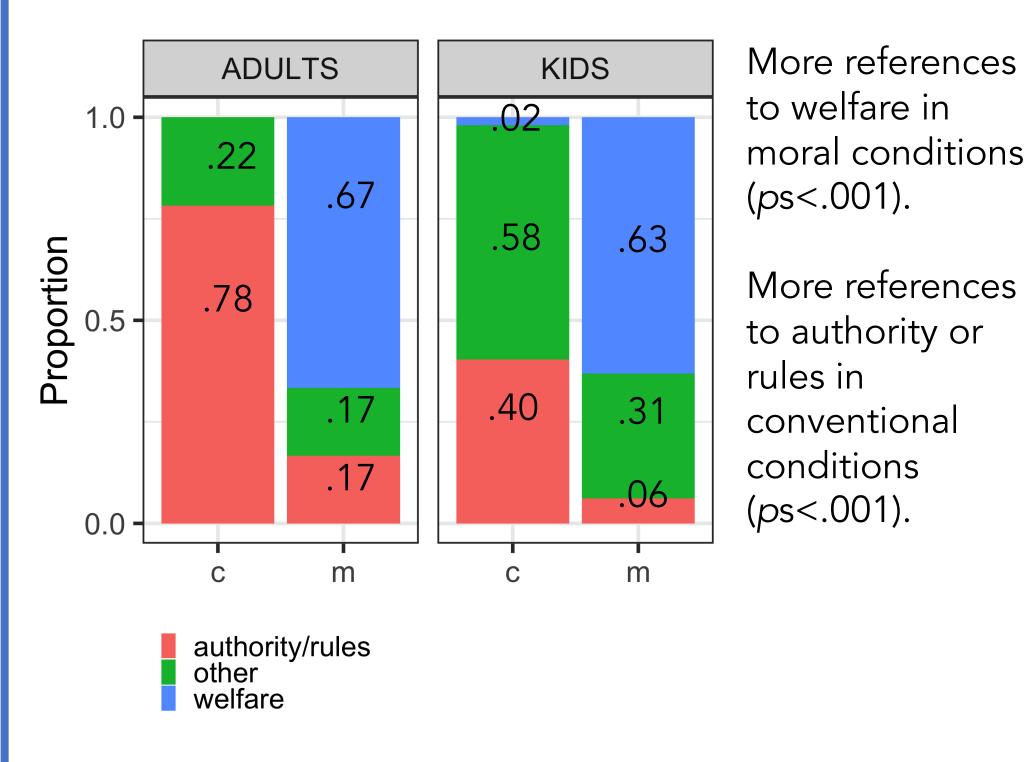
- Can preschoolers **rapidly** apply moral versus conventional concepts to **new** situations?
- Do the different measures form a consistent picture?
- What role does the transgressor's knowledge of the norm play for preschoolers' evaluations?



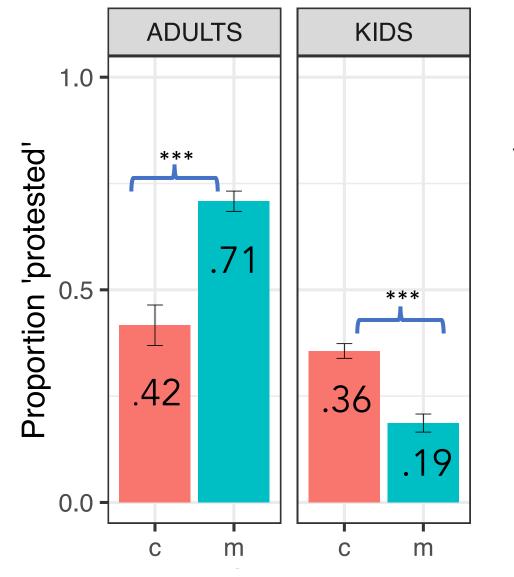


Results Study 1 144 preschoolers (3, 4, 5 years); 48 adults

Why did you think it was not okay to press?



Spontaneous protest during live transgression

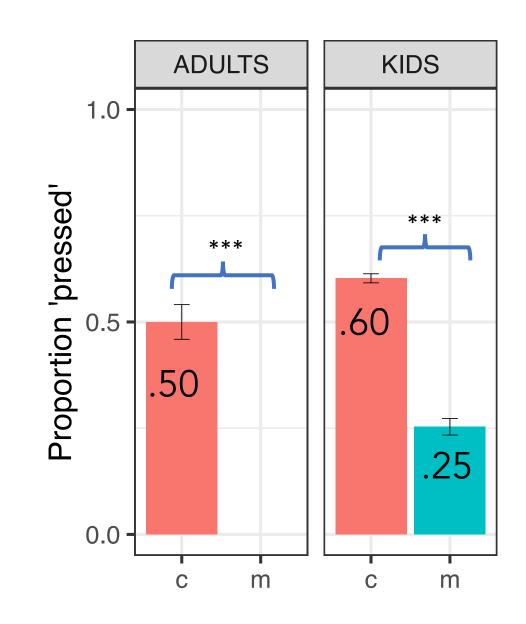


Preschoolers: More protest in conventional conditions because they assumed violation stemmed from ignorance?

Authority contingency: Adults and preschoolers more likely to say that conventional action would be okay if teacher permitted it (*ps*<.001).

Severity: Adults and 5-year-olds liked moral transgressions less (p<.001; p<.05).

Own transgression: Do you want to press?

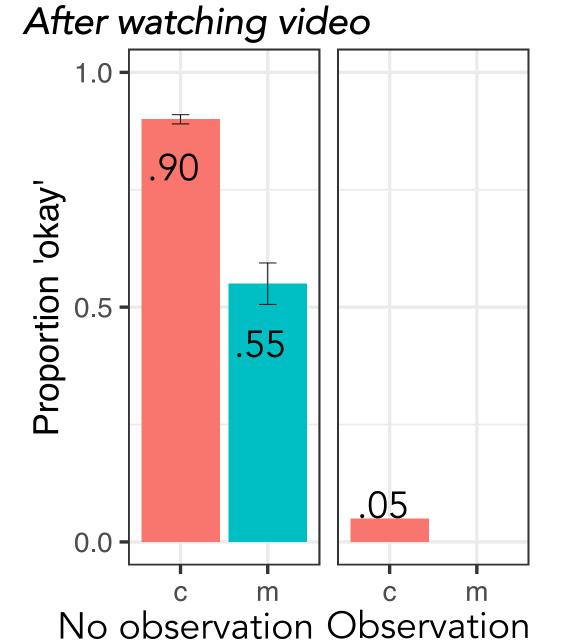


Conventional situations perceived as more context-sensitive, more arbitrary and less severe.

80 adults

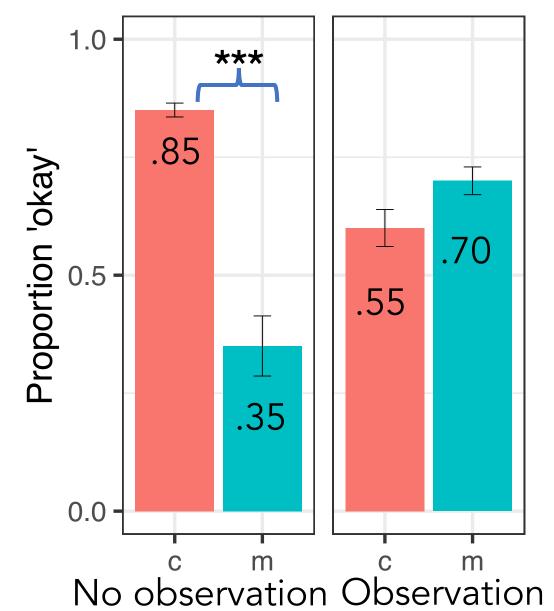
Results Study 2

Does the puppet think it's okay to press?



More likely to say puppet viewed action as ok in no observation (p<.001) and conventional (p<.05) conditions.

After 1st transgression

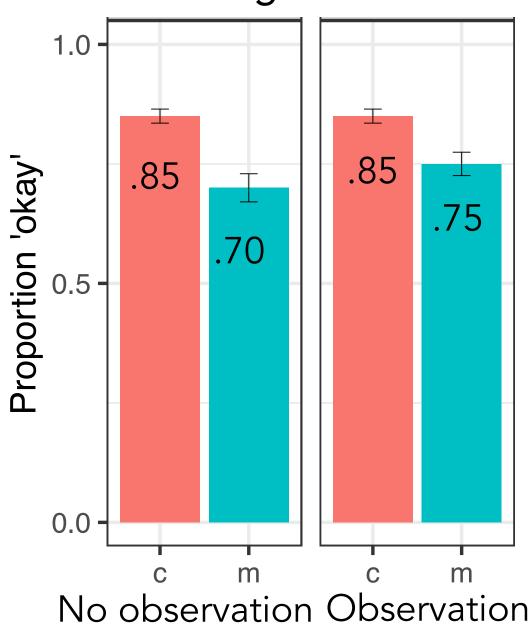


Expectation that puppet acquired moral norm from observing consequences of action, while acquisition of conventional norm requires observation of explicit prohibitions.

1st versus 2nd evaluation: Proportion of participants who say 'ok' after watching video different from proportion of participants who says 'ok' after 1st transgression (p<.001).

Legend

After 2nd transgression



c = conventional scenario

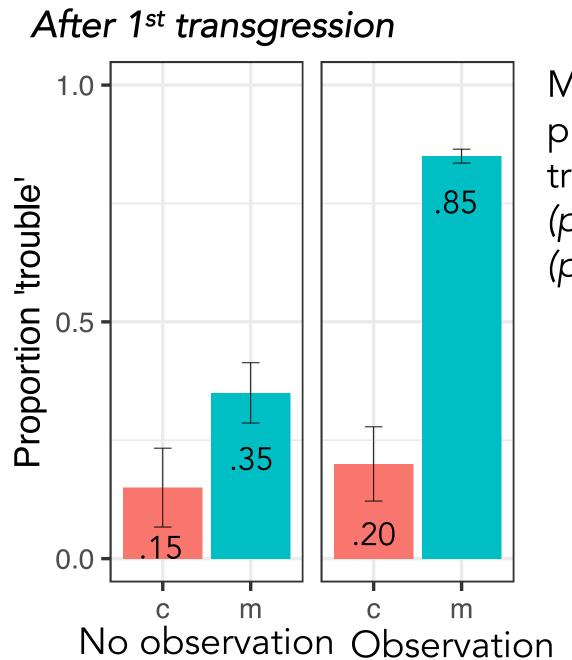
Error bars indicate ±1 SE

m = moral scenario

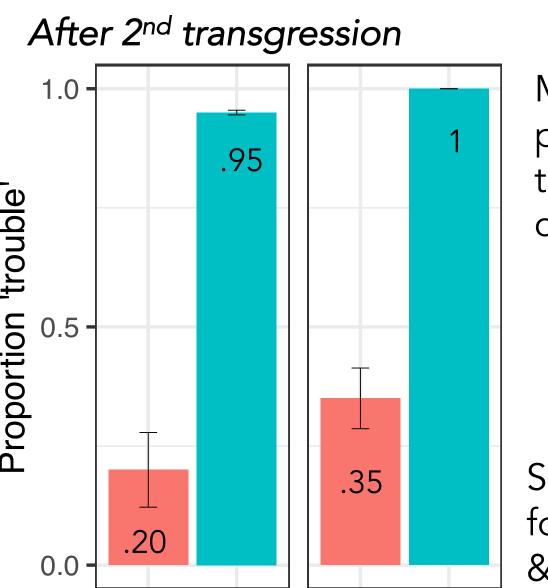
Most participants thought puppet viewed action as okay.

Results Study 2 continued

Do you think the puppet should get in trouble?



More likely to say puppet should get in trouble in observation (p<.001) and moral (p<.001) conditions.



More likely to say puppet should get in trouble in moral conditions (p<.001).

Similar patterns of results for measures of intention & blame.

No observation Observation

1st versus 2^{nd} evaluation: More likely to say puppet should get in trouble after 2^{nd} transgression (p<.001).

Conclusion and further directions

- Adults and preschoolers rapidly construct distinct moral and conventional evaluations about novel actions across judgments, reasoning, and actions.
- Adults believe people don't have to be taught that it is wrong to cause pain to others but do have to be taught arbitrary conventions.
- Data collection with preschoolers for Study 2 is ongoing. Findings promise to provide insight into how preschoolers attribute **knowledge of new norms** to others.

*** = p < .001 ** = p < .01 * = p < .05

The sources of normination in early childhood. Schmidt, Rakoczy, 8 selectively.

Selected references

1.Turiel (1983). The development of social knowledge. 2. Korsgaard (1996). The sources of normativity. 3. Killen (2014). Social and moral development in early childhood. 4. Turiel, E., 2006. The development of morality. 5. Schmidt, Rakoczy, & Tomasello (2012). Young children enforce social norms selectively.