



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Child Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jecp



Young children's behavioral and emotional responses to different social norm violations



Susanne Hardecker^{a,*}, Marco F.H. Schmidt^b, Meike Roden^c,
Michael Tomasello^a

^a Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, 04103 Leipzig, Germany

^b Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich (LMU Munich), 80539 Munich, Germany

^c Technische Universität Chemnitz (TU Chemnitz), 09111 Chemnitz, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 March 2016

Revised 24 June 2016

Available online 16 July 2016

Keywords:

Social norms

Moral development

Moral/conventional distinction

Emotions

Norm transgressions

First- vs. third-party involvement

ABSTRACT

From an early age, children can talk meaningfully about differences between moral and conventional norms. But does their understanding of these differences manifest itself in their actual behavioral and emotional reactions to norm violations? And do children discriminate between norm violations that affect either themselves or a third party? Two studies ($N = 224$) were conducted in which children observed conventional game rule violations and moral transgressions that either disadvantaged themselves directly or disadvantaged an absent third party. Results revealed that 3- and 5-year-olds evaluated both conventional and moral transgressions as normative breaches and protested against them. However, 5-year-olds also clearly discriminated these types of transgressions along further dimensions in that (a) they tattled largely on the moral violation and less on the conventional violation and (b) they showed stronger emotional reactions to moral violations compared to conventional violations. The 3-year-olds' responses to moral and conventional transgressions, however, were less discriminatory, and these younger children responded rather similarly to both kinds of violations. Importantly, most children intervened both as victims of the transgression and as unaffected third parties alike, providing strong evidence for their agent-neutral understanding of social norms.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: susanne_hardecker@eva.mpg.de (S. Hardecker).

Introduction

Young children reliably differentiate between moral norm violations that result in harm for another person (e.g., hitting another child) and conventional norm transgressions that merely break a rule (e.g., eating in class). At 3 or 4 years of age, they will judge the former as more serious, more deserving of punishment, and less contingent on the presence of a rule or a specific context as compared with the latter (Smetana, 1981). According to social domain theory (Helwig & Turiel, 2010; Smetana, 2013; Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, 2014; Turiel, 1983), children's reasoning in these cases occurs in conceptually distinct domains; the moral domain refers to matters of harm, fairness, and rights, and the conventional domain concerns the coordination of social interactions. In addition to naturalistic observations (Much & Shweder, 1978; Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, 1984), a large body of research in the tradition of social domain theory is based on verbal interviews about transgression scenarios that are highly familiar to the children from their daily lives, for example, pushing another child or disobeying a teacher's order (e.g., Smetana, Schlagman, & Adams, 1993). Another line of research complements this approach with more active behavioral measures, specifically, children's spontaneous verbal and non-verbal reactions when directly faced with a norm transgressor. In an experimentally controlled situation, for example, Vaish, Missana, and Tomasello (2011) found that 3-year-olds already disapprove of and actively intervene against someone inflicting harm on someone else. Similarly, Rakoczy, Warneken, and Tomasello (2008) found that 3-year-olds also protest against someone violating simple game rules.

Given these findings, young children are clearly responsive to different kinds of norm violations. However, to our knowledge only two recent studies have systematically compared children's spontaneous responses to harm-based versus rule-based norm violations. First, Schmidt, Rakoczy, and Tomasello (2012) found that 3-year-olds protested equally strongly against an ingroup member and an outgroup member when witnessing them committing a harmful transgression but protested more against a simple game rule violation when it was performed by an ingroup member rather than an outgroup member. Second, in an observational study of children's daily kindergarten routines, Ingram and Bering (2010) found that children tattled on both harmful and conventional transgressions but did so more frequently in response to harm-related transgressions and almost always when the children were victims themselves rather than on behalf of a third party.

Despite the consistent finding in behavioral studies that young children protest, sometimes vigorously, against different norm violations, it has not been experimentally investigated whether they do so equally frequently and equally vigorously (i.e., emotionally) for different kinds of violations. Investigating the emotional intensity with which children respond to different norm violations might provide a more thorough understanding of the mechanisms of domain distinction during early childhood. In a similar vein, Nichols (2004) claimed that witnessing moral violations generally results in a strong affective reaction, which in turn leads to a harsher and stricter judgment of these transgressions. Similarly, Ingram and Bering (2010) suggested that children might primarily tattle on transgressions that evoke a strong affective response, which is why they might have reported more on harm-related violations than on classroom rule violations. Related to this suggestion, it has also been shown that when infants commit normative transgressions themselves, from around their first birthdays they experience qualitatively different emotional responses from their mothers toward their moral transgressions as compared to other types of transgressions, emphasizing the role of emotionality in norm differentiation (Dahl & Campos, 2013; Dahl, Sherlock, Campos, & Theunissen, 2014). Thus, children's own emotional responses to different norm violations might benefit from these early emotional experiences and reactions to harmful and non-harmful transgressions, which is why one focus of the current studies is the emotionality of children's responses.

Another important question with regard to young children's responses to norm transgressions concerns whether and how children differentiate between transgressions that affect themselves and transgressions that affect a third party. In moral philosophy as well as psychology, the principle of impartiality and agent neutrality of norms is crucial (e.g., Kohlberg, 1963; Nagel, 1986). As such, norms apply to anyone in the respective group, and transgressors are to be reprimanded regardless of who was directly affected by the transgression. The reasoning for this is that the group needs its mem-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7274560>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7274560>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)