



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Cognitive Development



Young children's understanding of ownership rights for newly made objects



Patricia Kanngiesser^{a,*}, Bruce M. Hood^b

^a Department of Developmental and Comparative Psychology, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Deutscher Platz 6, 04103 Leipzig, Germany

^b School of Experimental Psychology, University of Bristol, 12a Priory Road, Bristol BS8 1TU, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Ownership
Social norms
Labor rule
Social cognition

ABSTRACT

Young children often use simple rules of thumb to infer ownership of objects, but do they also understand ownership rights? We investigated whether 2- and 3-year-olds would react to violations of ownership rights in the context of newly made objects. In Experiment 1, children protested and made spontaneous reference to ownership when a puppet took away the child's object, but protested little when a third party's objects were at stake. Yet, 3-year-olds attributed ownership to the third party when asked ownership questions. Children's ownership claims were due to the effort invested in making new things, as they rarely used ownership protest after having handled raw materials (Experiment 2). Two- and 3-year-olds thus showed an appreciation of ownership rights for their own newly made objects. While 3-year-olds understood third party ownership, they may have lacked the motivation to intervene in ownership rights violations involving a third party.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In Western culture, the concept of ownership significantly affects people's thoughts and behavior toward objects in their possession (Constable, Kritikos, & Bayliss, 2011; Cunningham, Turk, Macdonald, & Neil Macrae, 2008). Property ownership is also a social institution deeply engrained in the structure of human societies. It can be described as a triadic relationship between a person, another person and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 341 3550400; fax: +49 341 3550444.
E-mail address: kanngiesser@eva.mpg.de (P. Kanngiesser).

an entity which is mediated by different rights and duties (Christman, 1994). Ownership rights may include, for example, the right to exclusively use one's property or the right to exclude others from using it (Snare, 1972). Ownership is thus a complex concept to acquire, requiring the ability to identify relationships between people and their property and knowledge of social conventions regulating the use of one's own and others' property. Developmental studies have established that young children learn ownership relationships and infer ownership (Blake & Harris, 2011; Friedman & Neary, 2008), but there is still a conspicuous gap in our understanding of how cognitive development changes children's appreciation of ownership rights (Rossano, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2011).

Infants begin to show an understanding of ownership relationships between 1.5 and 2 years of age when they first use possessive pronouns like "mine" and "yours" (Hay, 2006; Tomasello, 1998) and identify owners of familiar objects such as their mother's toothbrush (Fasig, 2000). From two years of age children infer ownership of unfamiliar objects based on first possession, attributing ownership to the person who possessed an object first (Friedman & Neary, 2008). At 2.5 years of age they are able to learn ownership relationships between out of view objects and their owners (Blake & Harris, 2011). These abilities become more refined at three years of age, when children use object history to infer ownership (Friedman, Van de Vondervoort, Defeyter, & Neary, 2013; Gelman, Manczak, & Noles, 2012) and apply ownership rules such as ascribing ownership to a person who grants/denies permission to use an object (Neary, Friedman, & Burnstein, 2009) or who invested effort in making a new object (Kanngiesser, Gjersoe, & Hood, 2010). Yet, not until four years of age do children prioritize verbal ownership statements over physical possession of objects (Blake, Ganea, & Harris, 2012). Taken together, these findings suggest that children's understanding of ownership relationships manifests at two years of age and becomes more sophisticated during the preschool years.

Relating owners to their property, however, is only one ability necessary for developing a concept of ownership. Few studies have directly investigated at what age children start to appreciate the normative implications of ownership, i.e., that it is associated with certain rights that are respected and reinforced by a community. By age two children frequently defend their possessions (or possessions they were told were theirs) against take-over attempts by others (Eisenberg-Berg, Haake, & Bartlett, 1981; Hay & Ross, 1982) and begin to show respect for others' ownership of objects (Ross, 1996), providing some evidence for an early understanding of an owner's exclusive access to his or her property. In contrast, studies presenting children with third party ownership stories have shown that it is not until age 4–5 that children appreciate different ownership rights (Kim & Kalish, 2009) or differentiate between legitimate (gift giving) and illegitimate (stealing) transfers of ownership (Blake & Harris, 2009). Yet, more recently, Rossano and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that 2- and 3-year-olds protested against property rights violations when their own property was at stake, but that only 3-year-olds also interfered when a third party's ownership rights were violated. This suggests that by age 3 children are already aware of the normative structure of some rights for personal property, i.e., that property rights do not apply only to one's own possessions but to others' possessions, too. Yet, it is unclear whether young children's appreciation of ownership rights extends beyond the realm of personal property such as clothing, where ownership is already established and potentially very salient. Specifically, we were interested in studying whether children would show awareness of ownership rights for newly created objects.

Children have some understanding of the unique value of creations like pictures. Five- to 6-year-olds (but not 3- to 4-year-olds) evaluate a person negatively that intentionally copied someone else's picture (Olson & Shaw, 2011) and three-year-olds protest when a puppet tries to destroy a picture someone has just drawn (Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011). Furthermore, Kanngiesser and colleagues (2010) showed that 3- and 4-year-olds transfer ownership of an object from a previous owner to someone who has changed it into a new object. While these findings provide some preliminary evidence that children may attribute ownership rights to creators of new objects, none of the preceding studies directly addressed this question. Rather, they focused on children's understanding of ownership of ideas (Olson & Shaw, 2011), their reactions to moral violations (Vaish et al., 2011), or asked children direct ownership questions and thus potentially cued them into thinking about ownership (Kanngiesser et al., 2010).

To study young children's understanding of people's ownership rights for newly made objects, we adapted a (spontaneous) protest paradigm previously used to investigate children's awareness of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/916505>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/916505>

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