DOES GROUP MEMBERSHIP AFFECT
CHILDREN'S JUDGMENTS OF
SOCIAL TRANSGRESSIONS?

by

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ABSTRACT

Children judge moral transgressions as more serious and more punish-worthy than conventional transgressions (Slomkowski & Killen, 1992; Smetana, 1981). Children also judge the actions of in-group members more favorably than those of out-group members (Aboud, 2003; Zak & Knack, 2001). The current study asked whether children would judge moral and conventional transgressions committed by an in-group member differently when compared to the same acts committed by an out-group member (i.e., act judgments). Additionally, it asked whether children would judge the transgressors themselves differently based on their group status (i.e., in-group, out-group, neutral, and self). Results show that preschool children reliably judge moral and conventional transgressions differently. Compared to children's judgments of out-group members, their judgments of in-group members were more lenient. Results suggest that group membership does indeed affect how serious or punish-worthy a violation and a violator are judged to be.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who encouraged me and guided me through the trials and tribulations of writing this manuscript. In particular, my family, co-workers, and close friends who stood by my side throughout the entire process.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

df	Degrees of freedom: number of values free to vary after certain restrictions have been placed on the data
F	Fisher's F ratio: A ration of two variances
M	Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
M_S	Multiple Means
p	Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
r	Pearson product-moment correlation
$<$	Less than
$=$	Equal to

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INTRODUCTION

Are Children Sensitive to Group Membership?

Children are highly sensitive to social groups and quickly recognize the similarities and differences between group members and themselves (Aboud, 1988). Where there are similarities, children may perceive themselves as having an affiliation with the group (i.e., as an in-group member). In-groups may include individuals with close social ties such as friends, family members, or teammates. Where there are not similarities, children may perceive themselves as unaffiliated with the group (i.e., as an out-group member). Out-groups may include individuals with no social ties such as strangers but can also include individuals who are viewed as opponents or adversaries. Often children view groups with whom they are similar positively and groups with whom they are different neutrally or even negatively (Bennett, Barrett, Karakozov, Kipiani, Lyons, Pavlenko, & Riazanova, 2004). Social groups can further support children's tendency toward social stereotypes, such as the belief that only boys like trucks (Berndt & Heller, 1986; Biernat, 1991; Taylor, 1996; Taylor, Rhodes, & Gelman, 2009), and even lead to group-based biases, for example, favoring in-group over out-group members.

Group affiliations like this can in turn influence how both adults (Cohen, 2003) and children (Tajfel, 1978) experience the world. For example, Cohen found that group information (i.e., political party) strongly affected the attitudes and opinions of adults as well as their perception of political policies. However, different motivations may underlie children's perception of differences across groups (Brewer, 1999; Tajfel, 1978). Brewer found that things

like loyalty and cohesion influence group preferences and feed children's judgments about in-group and out-group members. Things such as age, relationships, and personal sacrifices can also influence when and how children distinguish social groups and ultimately how those groups are perceived (Aboud, 2003; Killen & Turiel, 1998; Neff, Turiel, & Anshel, 2002; Smetana, Tasopoulos-Chan, Gettman, Villalobos, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2009).

Importantly, children do not simply distinguish different social groups but they actually show strong preferences for in-group members when compared to out-group members (Brewer, 1999; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As a rule, children tend to prefer "what they know" to "what they don't know" and children tend to know more about their in-group. Starting as early as age 3, children prefer those who are similar to them to those who are not (Kinzler, Shutts, Dejesus, & Spelke, 2009; Kircher & Furby, 1971; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987; Moore, 2009). For example, Moore found children preferred sharing a toy with a friend to someone they didn't know. In addition, studies have found children display favoritism towards in-group members as compared to out-group members (Bigler, Brown, & Markell, 2001; Brewer, 1979; Nesdale & Flessner, 2001; Tajfel, 2001; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Yee & Brown, 1992). Bigler, Jones, and Lobliner (1997) found that in-group favoritism was especially likely when group membership was salient and was given a "functional" role in the setting. Bigler et al. (2001) looked at favoritism in groups and placed children into two groups to see how they would rate their team versus another team. They found that children tended to evaluate the opposite team more negatively and their team more positively.

This positivity can further carry over into emotions. Three- to 5-year-olds have been shown to view in-group members more positively than out-group members and tend to show positive emotions when sharing with someone within their in-group (Schug, Shusterman, Barth,

& Patalano, 2013). In Schug et al., children were shown video clips of puppets sharing candy; they found that children rated the clips based on how much candy was shared as well as the group membership of the puppet, showing favor towards in-group members over out-group members. Similarly, Butteltmann and Böhm (2014) found children would rather help an in-group member than hurt an out-group member, again demonstrating an orientation toward in-group members. At age 5, children are more likely to recall negative actions made by out-group members than negative actions made by in-group members. As they get older, children are also more likely to remember a positive act by an in-group member to a negative act by an out-group member (Dunham et al., 2011).

Beyond favoring in-group members and viewing them more positively, children also tend to trust in-group members more (Dunham, Baron, & Carey, 2011; Harris & Koenig, 2006; Zak & Knack, 2001). When trusting adults, children will listen to someone they know over someone they don't know. For example, Corriveau and Harris (2009) found that 3 year olds would favor a familiar teacher instead of an unfamiliar teacher even when the familiar teacher had given false information to the child. Elashi and Mills (2014) believed when deciding whom to trust, children should decide based on the knowledge of the source instead of group membership. However, they found that children are influenced strongly by group membership and base their decisions accordingly. Children tend to trust an in-group informant even when the informant provides them with false information. It has been found that when encoding new information and events, children tend to favor in-group members, which can ultimately influence their decision-making (Cohen, 2003; Dunham et al., 2011; Pettigrew, 1979).

While the studies reviewed thus far clearly show in-group members are viewed more positively than out-group members, it is certainly not the case that all out-groups or out-group

members are viewed the same (Buttleman & Böhm, 2014). In fact, out-group members are not always viewed negatively (Griffiths & Nesdale, 2006). Instead, they may be viewed indifferently or even, in rare cases, positively (Allport, 1954). Buttleman and Böhm found that love for the in-group forms early in the preschool years and can influence positive in-group biases. It is not until later in childhood that hate for the out-group forms.

Given the power of group membership to influence perceptions and behaviors, it might seem natural for group affiliations to develop over a long period of time and in step with experiences and interactions with the group. However, studies have instead shown group membership, or at least the judgments that reflect it, can develop after a minimal amount of time and with a minimal amount of information. Indeed, Mahajan and Wynn (2012) found that group membership could be established by simply putting colored mittens on infants. After the mittens were placed on their hands, infants chose to play with other infants wearing the same color mittens. In preschoolers, “minimal groups” can be formed by simply using stickers or colored t-shirts (Master & Walton, 2013). Even just using the word “group” to describe a collection of people can lead to in-group favoritism (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). How in-group and out-group favoritism develops during early childhood is still unknown by researchers. However, it is clear in these “minimal group” studies that group membership can be established quickly and with minimal knowledge of group members.

Children Differentiate between Domains of Social Action

At a young age, children work to understand their social world (Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, 2014). They participate in social systems and interact within social groups (Turiel, 1978). According to Social Domain Theory, these interactions lead children to begin distinguishing different domains of social knowledge, including moral, societal, and psychological domains

(Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, 2014; Turiel, 1978, 1983). Domains allow individuals, including children, to separate and organize different aspects of their social world. In turn, individuals come to view the actions committed in these domains differently. Among the most studied of these aspects are the separation of moral from conventional acts (Turiel, 1983). For example, moral transgressions (e.g., stealing, hitting, kicking) are distinguished from social-conventional transgressions in terms of seriousness, punish-worthiness, generalizability, and rule or authority contingency (e.g., Smetana, 1981; 1985).

In one of the earliest demonstrations of a domain distinction, Nucci and Turiel (1978) found teachers and children (ages 2-5) identified and responded to moral transgressions committed in a classroom, but only teachers responded to conventional transgressions. The study was divided into two parts. First, children and teachers were observed in the classroom. Observers recorded transgressions and then rated the responses of both children and teachers. Second, children and teachers were asked about the transgressions and their responses. Overall the study found that while teachers noticed and responded to both moral and conventional transgressions, children tended only to notice and respond to the moral transgressions.

Smetana (1981) extended this work by showing that preschool aged children could distinguish between moral and conventional transgressions along several different dimensions. Smetana studied how 2- to 4-year-olds judged moral and conventional transgressions in terms of seriousness, relativism of rules, and amount of deserved punishment. Featured transgressions were related to everyday classroom rules (i.e., not hitting, not taking a toy, not sitting in their spot during story time, and not putting toys back in the right spot). Children were shown drawings of each act and asked to rate them on a 3-point scale ranging from “okay” to “a lot bad”. The study found a strong effect for domain. Overall, children rated the moral

transgressions as being more serious and more deserving of punishment than the conventional transgressions. Additionally, moral transgressions were likely to be viewed as wrong in the absence of rules whereas conventional transgressions were less so. Subsequent studies further identified conventional transgressions as being contingent on rules and less generalizable compared to moral transgressions (Smetana, 1985; Tisak & Turiel, 1984). These findings suggest that children view moral and conventional transgressions as distinct along a broad set of dimensions (see also Smetana, 1985; Smetana, Schlagman, & Adams, 1993).

The emergence of this domain distinction seems to occur mainly over the preschool years. At the age of 2, children are not yet able to consistently distinguish between acts committed in the moral domain and acts committed in the social-conventional domain (Smetana & Braeges, 1990). However, by age 3, children have begun to understand the basic differences between domains and by the age of 4, children are more consistently distinguishing the acts committed in each domain. For example, Smetana (1981, 1985) found that children ages 4 and 5 could divide peer violations based on social or moral rules and judge them separately. By age 7, children appear to more fully understand the differences between the two domains (Nucci, 1981; Turiel, 1978).

In addition to domain judgments becoming more consistent as children age, their judgments also become more flexible as children are better able to consider personal or situation factors that underlie a particular act (i.e., intent of the act) (Berndt & Berndt, 1975). While domains may still strongly influence children's judgments, a variety of non-domain factors can also influence how a transgression is judged and the magnitude of the judgment can differ depending on which factor is in focus. Things like gender, age, and context can affect domain judgments (Buzzelli, 1993). The study found that younger children (i.e., ages 4 to 5 years) rated

transgressions committed by younger and older children as “equally wrong” whereas older children rated their same-aged peers’ transgressions as “more wrong” than the younger children’s transgressions. In regards to context, Helwig, Hildebrandt, and Turiel (1995) found that name-calling outside the context of a game was rated as more serious and more punish-worthy but within the context of the game was rated as less serious and less punish-worthy.

Group Membership and Social Judgments

While it is clear that a variety of factors can influence children’s judgments of social actions, perhaps the most powerful are those that are social in nature (Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, 2014). Indeed, as seen in the earlier discussion of in-group and out-group membership, even young children pay close attention to social or group status when judging others. More generally, it may be the case that judgments about others become more subjective when social factors are considered (e.g., Landrum, Mills, & Johnston, 2013). An open question is whether children consider group membership when judging the transgressions of others. Although this work is limited, findings tend to suggest that they might.

When judging transgressions children often rely on their relationship with the transgressor or “friendship”. Research shows that preschooler’s judgments of a peer teasing another peer or taking their toy may be influenced by familiarity with that peer (Slomkowski & Killen, 1992). Slomkowski and Killen found that when a non-friend took a toy away from someone, only 7% of the children viewed the act as “okay”. However, when their friend committed the same action, 43% of the children judged the act as “okay”. This shows that the children were much more lenient on their friends versus their non-friends. When a non-friend made a face at someone, only 12% of the children viewed making a face as “okay” and 28% said it was “okay” if their friend made a face. These findings support that children might consider the

status of the relationship with individual when judging the permissibility of their social transgressions. Interestingly, when friends and non-friends were positioned as the victim instead of the violator, children tended to show a different pattern. Children viewed victimization of friends as more permissible than victimization of non-friends.

Similarly, Linke (2012) studied how older children (9- to 18-year-olds) rated the severity of a transgression based on their social closeness to the perpetrator. Both Study 1 and Study 2 found that participant judgments were greatly affected by relationship closeness. In Study 1, transgressions perpetrated by family members were judged as less severe than the same transgressions committed by non-kin. In Study 2, transgressions perpetrated against family members were judged as more severe than the same transgressions committed against a schoolmate or a foreigner. Findings from Linke align with others that suggest children have different expectations about the likelihood that transgressions are committed against in-group and out-group members. Rhodes (2012) found that 6- to 10-year-olds expected harm to be committed against out-group members but prosocial actions like helping to be committed to in-group members. Young children (ages 3-5 years old) were similar in their expectation that harm would be delivered to out-group members but differed in that they believe prosocial action would be committed equally toward the two groups. Further, children expect that actors feel more obligated to help an in-group member and that prosocial actions committed toward an in-group member actually make the actor feel better than if those same actions were committed toward an out-group member (Weller & Lagattuta, 2013). Although, this does not mean that children wish harm or unfairness on out-group members, indeed, research has found that most preschoolers do not like it when people are treated unfairly because of their group membership (Bigler, Arthur,

Hughes, & Patterson, 2008; Killen, 2007; Killen, Pisacance, Lee-Kim, & Ardila-Rey, 2001; Rutland, Killen & Abrams, 2010).

The literature review thus far demonstrates that children are sensitive to group membership, judging in-group members more positively or more leniently than out-group members. It further demonstrates that children do not view all social transgressions similarly, judging moral transgressions as being more serious or more punish-worthy than conventional transgressions. Given these patterns of judgment, the current study asks whether children's judgments of moral and conventional transgressions might be influenced by the perpetrator's group membership. For example, will the same transgression be judged differently when it is committed by an in-group member as compared to an out-group member or a stranger? Further, will children judge the perpetrators of the actions differently based on their group affiliations?

To assess these questions, the current study will present children between the ages of 3 and 5 years with scenes depicting moral and conventional transgressions across a total of four "group" conditions. Sometimes the transgressions will be committed by an in-group member (as signaled by matched shirt color), an out-group member (as signaled by mismatched shirt color), a stranger, or the self (as constructed by the child). This final "self" condition is unique. While children are frequently studied in paradigms highlighting in-group or out-group membership, it is rarer for them to be studied in judgment of themselves. In one example however, Shultz, Wright, and Schleifer (1986), looked at how children judge an act if they are the victim. They found that when the act committed towards the children was intentional they viewed the act as more punish-worthy. However, when restitution was involved, the children were less likely to assign a harsh punishment for the transgressor. Still, studies like this where children are asked to judge scenarios in which they are a participant are not common. Consequently, this will act as an

exploratory condition in the current study. Overall, it is hypothesized that children will judge scenes that involve an in-group member more leniently than scenes that involve a stranger or an out-group member. Finally, it is hypothesized that the children will judge scenes that involve the self and scenes that involve an in-group member similarly.

METHOD

Participants

Seventy-four preschool children, including 3-year-olds ($N=25$, $M=42$ months), 4-year-olds ($N=26$, $M=53$ months), and 5-year-olds ($N=23$, $M=65$ months) participated in this study. There were 43 girls and 31 boys. Participants were recruited with parental consent and participant assent from childcare centers. These ages were selected based on previous research findings (Elashi & Mills, 2014; Slomkowski & Killen, 1992; Smetana, 1981). Researchers have found that children as young as 11 months old are able to distinguish between in-group and out-group membership using minimal group paradigms (e.g., Mahajan & Wynn, 2012). Additionally, studies find that by the time children are thirty months old, they are able to distinguish transgressions and judge the act (Smetana, 1981).

Procedure

Children were interviewed individually in a quiet place at their school, such as a separate familiar room or in the hallway outside their normal classroom. The children were informed that they would hear stories about cartoon characters, be asked questions about the characters, and judge the seriousness of things the characters do. They were also told that there were no right or wrong answers. Children completed a total of eight separate experimental scenes: four moral transgressions and four conventional transgressions. Both transgressions included neutral, in-group, out-group, and self conditions. For each scene children were asked to judge the

seriousness of the transgression, if the transgression deserved punishment, and if the character was a good or bad person.

Children were shown two scenes for each condition on a felt board using laminated characters. The first scene shown included a character in a school setting. Characters on the board were the same gender of the child and the same race. For the neutral condition, the investigator said, “This [boy/girl] is at school.” The child was then shown the next scene of the transgressor committing a transgression (e.g., moral or conventional). The investigator then said, “Look [he/she] just [act] that [boy/girl]”. Children were then asked to rate the action committed by the transgressor in the scene. The investigator asked, “Is [act] good or bad?” If the child indicated the act was “bad” they were asked, “Is [act] a little bad or a lot bad?” The seriousness of each act was rated as 0 (good), 1 (little bad), and 2 (a lot bad). The child was then asked to judge if the transgression deserved punishment. The child was then asked, “Should [act] be punished?” If the child answered “yes” they were then asked, “Should [act] be a little punished or a lot punished?” The punish-worthiness was then rated the same, 0 (no punishment), 1 (little punishment), and 2 (a lot of punishment). Lastly, children were asked to judge the actor. The children were asked “Is [actor] a good or bad person?”. If the child answered “bad”, they were then asked, “A little bad or a lot bad?”. The actor was then rated as 0 (good), 1 (a little bad) and 2 (a lot bad). These questions continued throughout the remaining scenes.

For example, when judging a conventional transgression in the neutral condition children were shown a cartoon scene in which a character commits a transgression, such as cutting in line. After witnessing the act, children were asked to judge the seriousness of that act (Smetana, 1981), if the act should be punished, and if the person committing the act was a good or bad person. After completing the three judgments, the character’s pieces on the board were adjusted

and the children were shown the next scene. The neutral condition featured a stranger and was always completed first. No attention was drawn to the group status of the stranger.

After the neutral condition, children were given a red t-shirt to distinguish in-group and out-group membership and children were instructed that they were now a member of the red team (Elashi & Mills, 2014; Patterson & Bigler, 2006). To ensure they understood this, children were shown a line-up of characters wearing different colored shirts (e.g., red and blue) and asked, “Who else is on your team?” Children then selected the two characters wearing red from the line-up. If the child pointed to the wrong character, the interviewer said, “Look at your shirt again, who else has the same color shirt as you?” A child did not progress to the remaining conditions until they correctly selected the character with the red shirt.

The remaining three conditions unfolded exactly like the neutral condition except that the actor’s identity changed for each condition. In the in-group condition, the cartoon actor had on a red shirt matching the child’s and was described as being a member of the red team (e.g., “This [boy/girl] is at school. Look, he/she has a red shirt on. He/she is on the red team. You have a red shirt too. You’re on the same team.”) In the out-group condition, the cartoon actor had on a blue shirt in contrast to the child’s and was described as being a member of the blue team (e.g., “This [boy/girl] is at school. Look, he/she has a blue shirt on. He/she is on the blue team. You have a red shirt. You’re not on the same team.”)

In the self-condition, the actor was designed by the child to resemble him or herself. The children used precut laminated pieces to create their character based on gender, skin color, hair color and length, favorite color, etc. At test, the actor was introduced with the child’s name, characteristics and described as being the child (e.g., “This is [child’s name]. Look he/she is a [boy/girl] and has [hair color] just like you. That’s you right there! This must be you.”).

RESULTS

In this study children were presented with three judgments: the seriousness of a social violation, if the violation deserved punishment, and how bad the violator was. The study also manipulated both the domain of the violation (moral and conventional) and the group membership of the violator (neutral with no group membership, a member of the in-group, a member of the out-group, and the self).

Does Group Membership Influence Children's Judgments about the Severity of an Act?

To answer this question a 2 (Domain: Moral vs Conventional) X 4 (Condition: Neutral, In-Group, Out-Group, and Self) X 3 (Age: 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted with domain and condition as within-subjects factors and age as a between subjects factor. The analysis revealed a main effect for domain, $f(1, 71) = 20.50, p = .000$. This domain effect indicated that children judged moral violations ($M=1.71$) as being more serious than conventional violations ($M=1.55$). The analysis also revealed a main effect for condition, $f(3, 69) = 9.87, p = .000$. Posthoc analysis of this condition effect indicated that children judged violations by out-group members ($M=1.80$) as being more serious than violations committed by neutral ($M=1.64, p=.007$), self ($M=1.51, p=.000$), or in-group members ($M=1.58, p=.001$). No other group differences reached significance. The analysis did not reveal a main effect for age (although this effect was approaching significance, $p=.063$) or any significant interactions (although the domain by age interaction was approaching significance, $p=.075$). See Table 1 for Domain and Condition Effects.

Table 1*Judgments of Act Seriousness across Domain and Condition (Mean out of 2)*

Condition	Domain		<i>Total</i>
	Moral	Conventional	
Neutral	1.73	1.54	<i>1.64^a</i>
In-group	1.64	1.54	<i>1.58^a</i>
Out-group	1.85	1.74	<i>1.79^b</i>
Self	1.64	1.38	<i>1.50^a</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>1.71¹</i>	<i>1.55²</i>	

Note: Different superscripts indicate statistically significant differences, $p < .05$

Does Group Membership Influence Children's Judgments of the Punish-worthiness of an Act?

To answer this question a 2 (Domain: Moral vs Conventional) X 4 (Condition: Neutral, In-Group, Out-Group, and Self) X 3 (Age: 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted with domain and condition as within-subjects factors and age as a between subjects factor. The analysis revealed a main effect for domain, $f(1, 71) = 16.10, p = .000$. This domain effect indicated that children judged moral violations ($M=1.58$) as being more punish-worthy than conventional violations ($M=1.37$). The analysis also revealed a main effect for condition, $f(3, 69) = 14.60, p = .000$. Posthoc analysis of this condition effect indicated that children judged violations by out-group members ($M=1.70$) as being more punish-worthy than violations committed by neutral ($M=1.53, p=.012$), self ($M=1.25, p=.000$), or in-group members ($M=1.41, p=.000$). In addition, children judged violations by the self as being less punish-worthy than violations committed by the neutral ($p=.003$) or the in-group members ($p=.049$). The difference between the neutral and in-group members did not reach significance ($p=.087$). Finally, the analysis revealed a main effect for age, $f(2, 71) = 3.44, p = .037$. Posthoc analysis of this age effect indicated that 4-year-olds ($M=1.67$) judged violations as being more punish-worthy than 3-year-olds ($M=1.33, p=.014$) and marginally more punish-worthy than 5-year-olds ($M=1.41,$

$p=.067$). Three- and 5-year-olds did not differ. The analysis did not reveal any significant interactions. See Table 2 for Domain and Condition Effects.

Table 2
Judgments of Act Punishment across Domain and Condition (Mean out of 2)

	Domain		Total
	Moral	Conventional	
Condition			
Neutral	1.68	1.39	1.53 ^a
In-group	1.49	1.34	1.41 ^a
Out-group	1.82	1.58	1.70 ^b
Self	1.32	1.18	1.25 ^c
<i>Total</i>	1.58 ¹	1.37 ²	

Note: Different superscripts indicate statistically significant differences, $p<.05$

Does Group Membership Influence Children's Judgments about the Actor?

To answer this question a 2 (Domain: Moral vs Conventional) X 4 (Condition: Neutral, In-Group, Out-Group, and Self) X 3 (Age: 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds) mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted with domain and condition as within-subjects factors and age as a between subjects factor. The analysis revealed a main effect for domain, $f(1, 71) = 36.88, p = .000$. This domain effect indicated that children judged moral violators ($M=1.50$) as being worse than conventional violators ($M=1.29$). The analysis also revealed a main effect for condition, $f(3, 69) = 10.45, p=.000$. Posthoc analysis of this condition effect indicated that children judged out-group violators ($M=1.62$) as being worse than neutral ($M=1.45, p=.021$), self ($M=1.14, p=.000$), or in-group violators ($M=1.37, p=.004$). In addition, children judged the self as being better than neutral ($p=.001$) or in-group violators ($p=.005$). The difference between the neutral and in-group members did not reach significance ($p=.30$). The analysis revealed a main effect for age, $f(2,71)=5.21, p = .008$. Posthoc analysis of this age effect indicated that 4-year-olds ($M=1.65$)

judged violators as being worse than either 3-year-olds ($M=1.20$, $p=.002$) or 5-year-olds ($M=1.34$, $p=.036$). Finally, the analysis revealed a domain by age interaction, $f(2, 71) = 4.80$, $p=.011$. Follow-up analysis of the interaction indicated that both 3-year-olds ($Ms=1.38$ and 1.02 , resp., $p=.000$) and 5-year-olds ($Ms=1.42$ and 1.25 , resp., $p=.006$) judged moral and conventional violators differently, whereas 4-year-olds did not ($Ms=1.70$ and 1.60 , resp., $p=.094$). The analysis did not reveal any other significant interactions. See Table 3 for Domain and Condition Effects.

Table 3
Judgments of the Actor across Domain and Condition (Mean out of 2)

	Domain		<i>Total</i>
	Moral	Conventional	
Condition			
Neutral	1.65	1.26	<i>1.45^a</i>
In-group	1.46	1.30	<i>1.37^a</i>
Out-group	1.70	1.54	<i>1.62^b</i>
Self	1.23	1.08	<i>1.14^c</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>1.50¹</i>	<i>1.29²</i>	

Note: Different superscripts indicate statistically significant differences, $p<.05$

DISCUSSION

Research in moral development has consistently shown that children and adults judge social transgressions differently (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, 1981; Smetana, 1985). For instance, studies typically find that moral transgressions such as hitting or kicking are judged as more serious and more punish-worthy than conventional transgressions such as cutting in line or littering (Smetana, 1981). Even preschoolers reliably make these distinctions (Nucci & Turiel, 1978). Separately, research on group membership consistently shows that children judge members of their own social group differently from members of other social groups (Hetherington Hendrickson, & Koenig, 2014). For example, studies typically find in-group members like friends or teammates are judged more favorably or more leniently than out-group members like enemies or opponents (Patterson & Bigler, 2006). Children can be so sensitive to group membership that even minimal group paradigms (where membership is determined by the color of a shirt) can yield differences (Hetherington et al., 2014). In the current study, children were asked to judge moral and conventional violations committed by members of different social groups. These group members included a neutral stranger, an in-group member, an out-group member, and the self. In total, children completed 8 trials. On 4 trials, children judged a moral violation committed by each group member. On 4 trials, children judged a conventional violation committed by each group member. Children judged each violation for its seriousness and punish-worthiness. In addition, children gave their global judgment of each violator. Of interest was whether children would judge the same violation differently based on the group membership of the violator.

Does Group Membership Influence Children's Judgments about the Severity of an Act?

There were two main interests for this question. First, would children judge moral violations as being more serious, or worse, than conventional violations? This has been a consistent finding in previous research (e.g., Smetana, 1981; Smetana, et al., 1993). In line with these findings, those from the current study show that children reliably judge moral violations like hitting or kicking as being more serious than conventional violations like littering or cutting in line. Interestingly, there were no age differences in severity judgments suggesting that each age group viewed the transgressions similarly. This means that how serious the acts were did not change with development across these ages. Second, would children judge violations differently depending on the social group of the violator? Previous studies show that group membership can often influence how members are judged (Buzzelli, 1993; Buttelmann & Böhm, 2014). Findings from the current study suggest that group membership does indeed affect how serious a violation is judged to be. Specifically, violations committed by members of the out-group were judged more harshly than violations committed by members in each of the other three social groups. That is, when the same act was committed by an in-group member, a neutral stranger, or the child themselves, the act was judged as being less harsh than when it was committed by an out-group member. Consistent with previous findings, children process in-group and out-group information differently, even when the experience is the same (Shug et al., 2013). However, children did not judge the violations committed by members of the in-group, by the neutral stranger, or by the self as being different from each other. This suggests that children were not more lenient when judging the seriousness of a transgression committed by an in-group member, which was something that was expected. Perhaps the acts were judged more similarly in these groups because this judgment focuses on the act rather than the person. It may also be that

children have learned that transgressions are bad independent of who commits them. Of course, this did not seem to protect the judgment of acts committed by the out-group member. Overall, it appears that when children are judging the severity of an act it pays not to be perceived as a member of the out-group (e.g., Shug et al., 2013).

Does Group Membership Influence Children's Judgments of the Punish-worthiness of an Act?

Again, two main questions were of interest. Would children judge moral violations as deserving more punishment than conventional violations? Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Smetana, 1981; Jones et al., 2009), the current study found that preschoolers reliably judged moral violations as deserving more punishment than conventional violations. Again, there were no age differences suggesting that each age assigned similar levels of punishment to the transgressions. Also of interest was whether children would assign punishment to violations differently depending on the social group of the violator. Current findings indeed suggest that group membership affects the assignment of punishment. Here, violations committed by members of the out-group were thought to deserve more punishment than violations committed by members in each of the other three social groups. So, again, when the same act was committed by an in-group member, a neutral member, or the child themselves, the act was seen as less punish-worthy than when it was committed by an out-group member. In addition, violations committed by the self were thought to deserve less punishment than violations committed by members in each of the other three social groups. Children saw themselves as deserving the least amount of punishment for having committed a social transgression, significantly less than any other group member. This suggests that children were much more lenient when punishing the self and much harsher when punishing the out-group member, thus

showing that the group membership of the transgressor does affect the amount of punishment that is given to the violation that is committed.

This observed pattern in punish-worthiness is closer to what was expected in that children further distinguished between different sub-groups. Perhaps, unlike the severity judgments, assigning punishment is more closely connected to the person receiving that punishment and so group membership is more salient in the judgment process. Notably, in-group members still did not receive a benefit from their group status when compared to a neutral stranger. It also appears that children are prone to going easy on the self. As seen in some studies on attribution biases more broadly (Johnston & Lee, 2005), it could be that children view their behavior as temporary or uncharacteristic and so are inclined to forgive. Finally, results show that 4-year-olds assigned punishment at higher rates than either of their age-mates. It is uncertain why 4-year-olds view both conventional and moral transgressions more punish-worthy than 3 and 5 year olds. It may be that 4-year-olds focus more on the act and view both types of transgressions as deserving of punishment while 3 and 5-year-olds focus on the violator.

Does Group Membership Influence Children's Judgments about the Actor?

There were two main questions of interest. First, would children judge a violator committing a moral violation as being a worse person than a violator that commits a conventional violation? Previous research, especially studies framed in terms of Social Domain Theory, do not typically solicit global actor judgments. Instead, this work tends to focus solely on judgments of the acts themselves (e.g., seriousness, punish-worthiness, etc.) (Smetana et al., 1993). However, past studies on children's trait attribution do show that children will infer broader traits about actors based on their history of actions, even actions that occur within a social domain. For example, Boseovski and Lee (2006) found that 3- to 6-year-olds made

broader trait-based conclusions about actors based on their history of positive (e.g., sharing) or negative (e.g., stealing) actions toward a peer. The attributed traits tended to mirror the valence of the acts with positive acts resulting in an actor who was viewed positively and negative acts resulting in an actor who was viewed negatively. Findings from the current study show that children reliably judge violators who commit moral violations as being worse than violators who commit conventional violations. Notably, person judgments did vary by age. When judging moral and conventional violators, 4-year-olds' global actor judgments were more extreme (i.e., more negative) than either 3- or 5-year-olds. This suggests that 4-year-olds may be more inclined to judge actors with a history of violating social rules as being "a lot bad" independent of the violation committed.

The second question of interest asks if children judge violators differently depending on their group status. Past studies suggest that they might. For instance, Hetherington et al. (2014) found that 4- and 5-year-olds' preference for group members changed based on a history of prosocial and anti-social behavior. Likewise, similar to the current study, Slomkowski and Killen (1992) found that preschoolers judge the social transgressions of friends and non-friends differently, potentially setting the stage for those act judgments to influence their view of the actors. Findings from the current study align with this prior work suggesting that group membership affects how harshly violators are judged when they have a history of committing transgressions. Specifically, out-group violators were judged more harshly than violators who were members of each of the other three social groups. That is, when the same transgressions were committed by either an in-group member, a neutral member, or the self, the actor was subsequently judged as being less bad than when those transgressions were committed by an out-group member. Interestingly, the opposite pattern emerged for judgments of the self. Here

children were the most lenient. When the self was the violator, children judged the self as being less bad than every other group member.

The current study also showed a domain and age interaction. The 3- and 5-year olds were able to distinguish between the moral and conventional domains, judging moral violators as being worse than conventional violators. The 4-year-olds, however, did not. Four-year-olds did not reliably distinguish between moral and conventional violators, although both were judged negatively as indicated by the age effect discussed earlier. The violator was judged to be just as bad when committing a moral transgression as when committing a conventional transgression.

Conclusions

Children consistently observed the domain distinction. In all three judgments (severity of a transgression, the deserved punishment, and the reflection on the violator), moral violations and violators were judged more harshly than their conventional counterparts. In terms of the act judgments, the distinction between severity and punish-worthiness for moral and conventional violations replicates previous studies (e.g., Smetana, 1981, 1985). Interestingly however, the person judgments represent a relatively novel finding within the context of Social Domain Theory. Studies have not traditionally solicited global judgments of an actor based on their history of transgressing within either the moral or conventional domain. Here the results suggest that domain distinctions do persist even in broader judgments about the person, perhaps indicating that social domain theory could be a useful framework for considering judgments that go beyond the mere acts.

Children also consistently observed the in-group/out-group distinction. Group membership influenced both act and actor judgments. Members of the out-group (and their actions) were consistently judged more harshly than members of other social groups committing

the same transgressions. In fact, conventional violations committed by out-group members appeared to be judged as, or more, harshly than moral violations committed by the in-group members. This suggests that an in-group member committing an act like hitting (which causes harm) is as bad, or perhaps even less bad, than an out-group member committing an act like cutting in line (which is simply rude).

One novel aspect of the current study was including a “self” group. That is, children were asked to judge transgressions committed by the self. Results found that the self was often treated with much greater leniency than the members of any other group. When judging the punish-worthiness of a transgression and when judging whether transgressions would reflect negatively on the violator, children appeared to grant clemency to the self. That is, they judged with extreme leniency the punishment the self deserves and the degree to which the disposition of the self should be judged negatively. In fact, the self was judged more leniently than any other social group on these two judgments. Only on act severity did judgments of the self not result in an obvious advantage, although even in this case the acts committed by the self received the least negative rating compared to other groups (in terms of the raw mean) and were judged as being significantly less serious than the same acts committed by an out-group member.

While children’s pattern of self-judgment might seem unsurprising, perhaps even intuitive, how children judge the self in the social domain is not a widely studied topic. However, studies from multiple other domains suggest that children do view the self differently, often favorably, such as in overestimating the self’s ability or in more positive ratings of the self. In the cognitive domain, children see themselves as more academically competent than their peers (Stipek & Tannatt, 1984) and overestimate their knowledge (Mitchell & Robinson, 1990; Taylor, Esbensen, & Bennett, 1994). In the physical domain, children overestimate their performance on

physical tasks like sidling under a wooden bar (Plumert, 1995). In the personal domain, children rate their own possessions more positively (i.e., “the endowments effect”) (Hood, Sandra, Marsh, & Kanngiesser, 2016). And, as shown in the current studies, it appears that this tendency to view the self through “rose-colored glasses” may also extend to the sociomoral domain.

Overall, this study shows that domains persist even when group membership varies. However, group membership can affect the judgment of both an act and the actor, showing that how children judged an act is not solely based on the domain of the act but also on the group membership of the violator.

Limitations

Studies typically question the seriousness of a transgression, the punish-worthiness of the transgression, the generalizability, if the judgment is contingent on the presence of a rule, and if the judgment is contingent on the presence of authority. The current study chose to focus on two judgments (seriousness, punish-worthiness) to see if they would yield group differences.

Gender and race have been important in social groups but not necessarily in social transgressions. Future studies could reasonably study how the gender or race of the transgressor might affect judgments of moral and conventional transgressions.

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APPENDIX

September 30, 2016

Melissa Chapman
Department of Human Development & Family Studies
College of Human Environmental Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870160

Re: IRB # 15-OR-303-R1 "Judging Social Transgressions and Group Membership"

Dear Ms. Chapman:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of documentation informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on September 29, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance

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**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

I. Identifying information

	Principal Investigator	Second Investigator	Third Investigator
Names:	Melissa Chapman	Jason Scofield	
Department:	HDFS	HDFS	
College:	HES	HES	
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Title of Research Project: Judging Social Transgressions and Group Membership

Date Submitted: 9-18-16

Funding Source: None

Type of Proposal	☐ New	☐ Revision	☒ Renewal Please attach a renewal application	☐ Completed	☐ Exempt
Please attach a continuing review of studies form					
Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page					

UA faculty or staff member signature: _____

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: _____ Full board ☒ Expedited

IRB Action:

☐ Rejected Date: _____
☐ Tabled Pending Revisions Date: _____
☐ Approved Pending Revisions Date: _____

☒ Approved-this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 9-29-17

Items approved:

☐ Research protocol	(dated _____)
☐ Informed consent	(dated _____)
☐ Recruitment materials	(dated _____)
☒ Other	(dated _____)

Approval signature

Date 9/30/2016