

Who Done It?: The Effect of Moral Context on Children's Ability to Identify Perpetrators in a Lineup

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Introduction

- Children as young as three understand the difference between right and wrong (Mascaro & Sperber, 2009)
- Moral Transgressions** (Smetana & Ball, 2018)

Physical Harm

- Concrete and easily observable
- Ex: Hitting

Psychological Harm

- Understanding others' thoughts & feelings
- Ex: Teasing

Unequal Distribution

- Personal interests not at stake
- Ex: Sharing unfairly

Physical Harm = more wrong, deserving of punishment, rule and authority independent, and intended.

- Lineups** (Lowenstein et al., 2010)

Target presence vs. absence

- Target-present = more accurate IDs (present: 60%, 67%, absent: 13%, 47%)

Age

- Younger children make more errors when identifying a guilty person
- Target-present lineup (Brackmann, et al., 2019)
 - 7- to 10-year-olds: 60 correct ID's
 - 11- to 13-year-olds: 68.4 correct ID's
 - 14- to 16-year-olds: 78 correct ID's

Previous exposure to an innocent individual (Deffenbacher, et al., 2006)

Purpose

- Extend research on facial recognition from a lineup in children ages 3 to 5 years
- Investigate how children's identification accuracy varies as a function of moral transgression type

Hypotheses

H₁: Children will more accurately identify perpetrators who committed physical harm than those who committed psychological harm and unequal distribution.

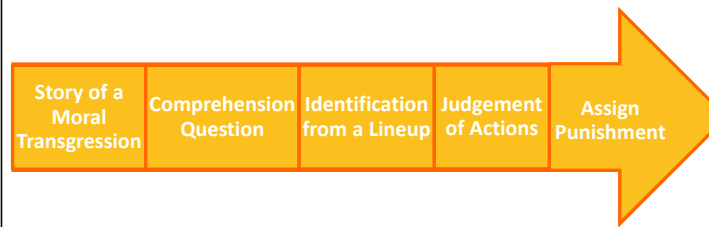
H₂: Children will assign more severe punishments for those who committed physical harm than those who committed psychological harm and unequal distribution.

H₃: Children will consider physical harm "less okay" than psychological harm and unequal distribution.

Method

Design: 2 (age: younger vs. older) x 3 (transgression type: physical; psychological; resource distribution) repeated measures ANOVA.

Participants: 60 3-to-5-year-old children (27 boys; $M_{age} = 49.6$ months, $SD_{age} = 6.87$ months) recruited from early education programs in and around Waterville, ME.



Materials



Vignette Story Cards

Lineup Cards



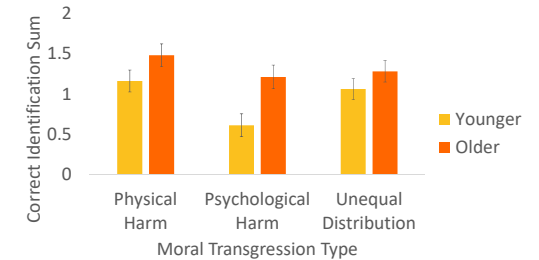
Smiley Face Likert Scale

Discussion

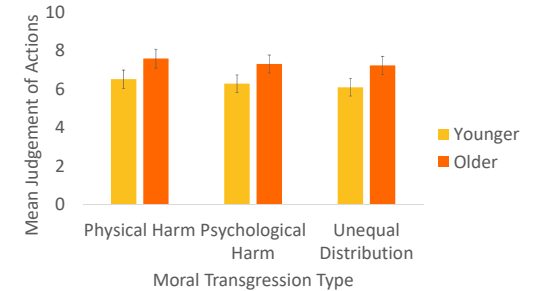
- 3- to 5-year-olds will be **most reliable eyewitnesses** when identifying a perpetrator of **physical harm** as compared to psychological harm or unequal resource distribution
- Physical harm** = most heinous moral transgression
- Younger children**: worse at identifying the perpetrator, suggesting they do not fully understand the moral transgressions

Results

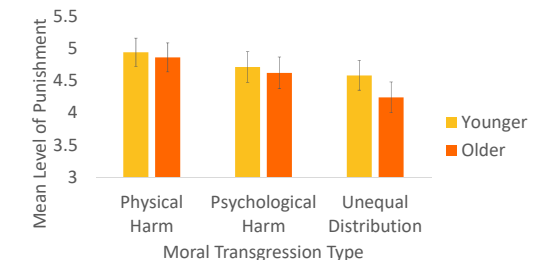
Children performed better than chance at identifying the perpetrators in the lineup, $t(59) = 14.22, p < .001$.



Significant difference between physical and psychological harm but not unequal distribution, $F(2, 116) = 6.74, p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. Older children outperformed younger children, $F(1, 58) = 6.76, p = .012$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$.



Older children judged transgressions as "less okay" than younger children, $F(1, 58) = 4.35, p = .042$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$.



Children assigned higher levels of punishment to physical harm than psychological harm or unequal distribution, $F(2, 116) = 4.48, p = .013$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$.

Acknowledgements

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