“That's Not Fair!”: Children's Judgments of Moral Behavior and Maternal Fairness in Transgression Encounters

by

Marla Johnston

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Herbert Saltzstein

Date — Chair of Examining Committee

Maureen O’Connor

Date — Executive Officer

William Arsenio

Joan Miller

Joseph Glick

Patricia Brooks

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

“THAT'S NOT FAIR!”: CHILDREN'S JUDGMENTS OF MORAL BEHAVIOR AND MATERNAL FAIRNESS IN TRANSGRESSION ENCOUNTERS

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Adviser: Herbert Saltzstein

This study investigated how children evaluate good/bad and how they judge maternal reactions as fair/unfair. Of particular interest was whether evaluations and judgments during transgression encounters are influenced by the child’s age, the domain in which the encounter occurs (Moral, Social-Conventional, Personal or Prudential), variations in story intention/outcome, and the mother’s reaction to the transgression. Mothers of twenty-five 3-12 year old children documented multiple real-life discipline encounters they experienced with their child via online questionnaires. Three of each mother’s self-reported encounters along with three additional hypothetical stories were coded for domain, written into a storybook format, and read to their child during in-person interviews. Each child evaluated how good/bad the protagonist of each story was and how fair/unfair the mother in the story was. Results indicate that older and younger children differ in their moral evaluations of encounters in the Moral, Social-Conventional, and Prudential domains. Evaluations of good/bad and fair/unfair vary as a function of age, story intention/outcome, and maternal reaction.

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Statement of the Problem

“That's not fair!”. It is a phrase that children use even at a young age. They shout it with disbelief and disdain at even the most minor of perceived injustices, or perhaps simply because they are displeased with an outcome that is not in their favor. It was the underlying assumption of the present study that the concept and understanding of what makes something or some event fair or unfair evolves with development. We may then ask, what are the social and cognitive influences that play a role in this unfolding development? My guiding assumption was that the concept of fairness is one that is inevitably intertwined with children's own moral development. Understanding what makes something good or bad would appear to be a necessary precursor for evaluating what makes something fair. Expanding on my earlier research in this area, I sought with the current study to examine social and developmental factors that I believed might play a significant role in children's evaluations of good/bad, and fair/unfair. Although there has been an abundance of research that examines both the social and cognitive influences of moral development, the present study is unusual in two ways.

First, current moral developmental research has not evaluated both the fair/unfair and good/bad concepts within the context of social and cognitive domains. This research attempts to expand the understanding of how a child's

evolving cognitive abilities relate to their abilities to reason about what makes an act good or bad and what makes an outcome fair or unfair within various domains of thought. It is also my belief that for young children, there may be an intrinsic reward in focusing their own judgments based on their mother's reactions or perhaps alternatively, using their mother's reactions as a simple reference point when making moral decisions. For example, basing their own judgments largely on their mother's reaction may simplify the cognitive aspects of the decision-making process for younger children or may carry the emotional reward of being “like Mommy.” However, older children may rely on other cognitive rules and reasoning skills when making such judgments of parents' fairness and judging the morality of transgressions.

Second, most of moral development research is based on children's evaluations of hypothetical vignettes. This study examines children’s moral evaluations of stories that were thinly veiled versions of a transgression encounter they had personally experienced.

Of parenthetical note, this study also sought to uncover new areas for future inquiry regarding children’s evaluations of the good/bad and fair/unfair concepts by exploring methods, which should be considered preliminary: the use of both real-life and hypothetical stories during child interviews, and the impact of maternal discipline style as coded from self-reported descriptions of mother-child transgression interactions. By exploring how children make real-life moral reasoning decisions within the parent-child context, it is believed that later studies could fill a gap in the moral development literature by exploring the

influence of maternal discipline styles on children’s judgments in different domains.

In the present study, I have therefore aimed to determine the following: 1) what is the relationship between children's age and reasoning in evaluating actions as good or bad, 2) what is the relationship between children's age and features of the moral encounter focused on when judging the reactions of a mother as fair or unfair, 3) do children judge either the transgression or the mother's reaction differently depending on intention/outcome and maternal reaction, and 4) and how do the answers to these questions depend on the domain in which a transgression occurs?

Literature Review

Moral Development

Developmental psychologists have long sought to understand both the social and cognitive mechanisms that lead to internalization of moral values. Why is it that some children develop a strong moral compass while others do not? While early psychoanalytic theory placed such development squarely on early parent/child interactions, later cognitive theorists gave lesser weight to the role of parents and instead focused on peers as the most influential factor in moral upbringing (Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1969). Although peers may allow for a certain kind of moral reasoning give-and-take to occur, surely parents have a personally vested interest in seeing their children become fair and moral individuals. In fact, it seems reasonable to believe that parents would be more concerned with their children's moral development than other individuals who

work as moral socializing agents. Perhaps in a reaction against the psychoanalytic preoccupation with early parent/child relationships, moral developmental researchers such as Piaget and Kohlberg deemphasized the role of parents in their children's moral development (Walker & Taylor, 1991). While there are certainly outside developmental influences including friends, teachers, and others, parents are likely the most concerned socializing agents when it comes to wanting to have an influence on their children's moral beliefs, especially in the early years. Because so much moral research has focused on peer influence, there still remains a need to further interpret how and in what ways do parent-child interactions influence moral reasoning ability. More specifically, what are the factors and phenomena that take place in the daily interactions between parents and children that help shape the fundamental ability to reason good from bad and right from wrong? What are the social-cognitive developmental mechanisms that occur during such interactions and how do they not only influence children's judgments of what is right, but also their judgments of their parenting experience as just and fair? How may our understanding of children's own moral thinking help us understand how they evaluate parental interventions?

Piagetian Theory

Piaget (1932) described early moral development as being heteronomous, by which he meant that from about three to seven years of age, children tend to confuse the outcome, the physical characteristics of the act and its conformity to authority's dicta with moral rightness or wrongness of the act, thus often ignoring the intention behind the act when evaluating whether a behavior is good or bad.

Children in this stage of heteronomous thinking also view rules as being unalterable, but paradoxically, it is also during the stage of development that a child's thinking is highly suggestible, often deferring to an adult's judgments. Heteronomous thinkers tend to view adults as omnipotent beings whose decisions and directives are to be automatically accepted (e.g., Aldrich & Mancuso, 1976). It is only as children get older, when their moral cognition shifts from a heteronomous view to an autonomous one, that children begin to recognize that an act being rewarded by adults does not necessarily make it a good act and an act disapproved by adults, a bad act. Older children, who are often distinguished from their younger counterparts based on the cognitive shift from pre-operational to operational thought at about seven years of age, are said to be autonomous thinkers and thus form their own moral judgments by examining moral situations more critically and with greater independence from adult authority. When children are older, they are thus capable of not only more complex interpretations of an act itself, but also more complex evaluations of whether it is appropriate or not for an adult to approve or disapprove of the act. Older, autonomous thinking children, therefore, are much more discriminating in how they make their own moral judgments and they are less blindly influenced by adult directives. That is, they have moral standards against or by which they evaluate adult's reactions. Lemen and Duveen (1999) state that

> In order to proceed from heteronomous to autonomous forms of thought, the child must come to understand that the social relations which morals regulate serve a purpose beyond being a forum for the acceptance of

> authority figures' commands. The development of moral knowledge is therefore simultaneously a process of socialization; and the grasp of autonomy is at one and the same time a social psychological and developmental achievement (Duveen, 1997; Moscovici, 1990) (p.558).

Much of the Piagetian literature on moral judgment and reasoning has examined the well documented tendency for young children to be outcome-oriented in their moral judgments, often ignoring intentions or mitigating circumstances (Piaget, 1932). Thus, as children get older, participate more in peer interaction, and develop more autonomous thinking skills, there is a gradual shift to value intention over outcome in moral decision making. Recently there appears to be a resurgence in interest regarding how children of varying ages process information featured in moral judgment situations. A study by Nobes, Panagiotaki, and Pawson (2009) suggests that previous research findings may be misleading because there appears to be a confounding factor between negligence and outcome when children are making moral evaluations. Specifically, Nobes, et al. (2009) state that “negative consequences are considered to be important because children assume they are caused by negligence” (p.382). Their findings indicate that while older children and adults do tend to judge an ill-intended action to be morally wrong, they also will consider negligence as a factor in well-intentioned acts. This means that even if an act is well-intentioned but has a bad outcome, older children and adults will examine whether the person committing the act behaved in a negligent way as a component of their moral evaluations. Interestingly, younger children (3 – 6

years of age) seemed to misattribute negligence. Nobes, et al. (2009) noted that children in this age range “found or invented negligence – and judged agents accordingly” (p.393). It seems that these young, heteronomous thinkers were just as likely to attribute negligence to careful actors as they were to careless ones. Furthermore the children in this study only made such mis-attributions when the acts were well-intentioned but with a negative outcome. It is suggested that young children seem to operate under the impression that all “accidents” are foreseeable and therefore avoidable. That research is of interest to the present research study because many of the everyday interactions between parents and children contain the element of negligence. Parents certainly react to children's missteps very differently if the negative consequences of those missteps are due to foreseen (thus, negligent) versus unforeseeable consequences. How children of varying ages interpret that parental reaction is likely to color their interpretations of the right and wrong of the transgression, as well as the fairness of the parental interpretation and reaction. Turiel (2008) recently discussed this component of moral judgments and noted that children’s interpretations of events generally influence their judgments.

Fairness

Sullivan (1953, as cited in Youniss, 1980) discusses how parents have definite thoughts about children's actions. “The ideas are imposed on children and parents expect children to accept them. Parents do not approve of everything children do. Approval is selective. To be accepted, children have to conform to the scheme of approval which parents possess,” (Youniss, 1980; p.

273). It would therefore seem plausible that young children with less social experience and a less developed sense of morality would view an adults' reaction to a transgression as an indicator of what is “correct” both in terms of good or bad, and fair or unfair. Given the cognitive reasoning abilities of young children, younger heteronomous thinkers might view maternal reactions as always fair because they are more likely to conform their own behavior to adult expectations. Older children, however, are more likely to critically evaluate maternal reaction based on the situation, and to their own ideas of what is right. Older children are more likely to look beyond parental interpretation of a situation in making their own moral judgments. Young children may simply view that whatever a mother's reaction is to a transgression situation is “fair” simply because they think mothers, and probably other adult authorities, are always right. It is also plausible to expect that young children may view maternal reaction as “fair” in situations when no one gets in trouble, regardless of whether or not negative consequences would be appropriate.

There is relatively little research that evaluates judgments of parents’ fairness in relation to what children think is fair. Borba (2001) states that “fairness is what induces us to treat others in a righteous, impartial, and just way, and is therefore an essential value for moral intelligence” (p. 230). Fairness is certainly a concept that parents can nurture and teach. In order for children to understand what makes something fair, they need to see a model of fair behavior. Modeling fairness inherently includes parenting practices, strategies, and discipline styles that show honesty, integrity, sharing, listening, and acting in

a just way. Siegal (1982) suggests that development of the understanding of fairness may be attributed to children looking up to adult models who may serve as a source of moral identification. Thus, as a consequence of varying parental practices, children have differing exposures to what is fair both as a function of parental models, and also as a function of the amount of time or interactions as it relates to their age. To date, there has not been a significant amount of research concentrating on how children evaluate parental fairness, but based on my previous research findings pertaining to maternal fairness, in the present study I anticipated that a child’s judgment of parental fairness should follow a similar pattern of the developmental unfolding of moral-cognitive skills in the decision making process. Thus, in the current study, I expected to find that young children would rely more heavily on mother's judgment of a transgression when judging both good and bad and fair and unfair. Because older, autonomous thinkers tend to be more critical in their evaluations, it was also expected that older children would evaluate maternal fairness by focusing on a match between maternal reaction (good/bad) and the intentions and/or the mitigating circumstances of the transgression situation and less simply on the maternal reaction itself.

In their discussion of how a child's perception of parental intervention as suitable to the transgression is important for moral development, Grusec and Goodnow (1994) also mention how this proposition holds true for older children. Older, autonomous thinking children are capable of recognizing that parents should evaluate intentions and mitigating circumstances before judging transgression and making discipline decisions. However, younger children, who

are heteronomous thinkers, have difficulty interpreting mitigating circumstances and are therefore more likely to look to parental reaction in both their judgments of good and bad and fairness as a cue of what is appropriate. Essentially, if Mom says it, then it is so. Hoffman (1994) points out that “research on what children of different ages view as fair has yielded a fairly clear consensus about children's notions of fairness, as reflected in their reasoning about distributive justice” (p. 250). Although reasoning about distributive justice is different from reasoning about parental fairness, it likely follows a similar line of reasoning ability in children of varying ages. Older children recognize that distributive justice is not just about making things “even” in the way that younger children might view it, but rather that there are mitigating factors and circumstances that make something just. The ability to make such distinctions would seem to be necessary in evaluating parental fairness, as well. Thus, although the concept of distributive justice is different from how children judge whether or not maternal reaction to a transgression is fair, there may be some parallels in how these judgments unfold. Hoffman (2000) discusses how children of varying ages differ in their thinking about allocating rewards for work done. Their ideas of what is “fair” in distributive justice, vary according to age, with young children allocating rewards based on their own self interest, 5 and 6 year olds allocating based on equal distribution, and with older children examining much more complex factors such as the amount of contribution made, individual need, etc (Damon & Hart, 1992). Again, while distributive justice may be a different concept than evaluations of parental fairness, what Hoffman's (2000) study illustrates is that

older children should be able to take context into account when making judgments of good and bad and fair and unfair, while younger children appear to lack, or at least not use, this ability.

In addition to the evaluations above, in the present study I aimed to examine whether children make differential moral and fairness judgments dependent on their own personal parenting history. Instead of making such judgments about hypothetical mothers in hypothetical vignettes, in the current study I also examined how parenting affects these judgments in real-life. In order to determine maternal discipline style, the present study utilized maternal journals of transgression encounters for maternal discipline styles as a way of accessing how parents actually handle moral and other disputes within the parent-child relationship. Use of Authoritarian, Indulgent or Authoritative parenting attitudes and discipline techniques was examined and each transgression was rated for the discipline approach most often used by each mother across reported transgression encounters. In the past, researchers have often used parenting questionnaires in an effort to determine overall discipline style (Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff, & Acker, 1993), but such questionnaires lend themselves to social desirability problems and often show little variation in style. For these reasons, in the present study I instead rated overall maternal discipline style by examining reported transgressions for acts of maternal power assertion, physical punishment, reasoning, affection, induction, giving in to demands, etc. In the current study therefore, I sought to evaluate how the social reaction of real-life maternal discipline factors into children's judgments of both the maternal

discipline itself and the nature of the transgression. It should be noted, however, that the methods used in the current study can only yield a preliminary analysis of the influence of maternal discipline on children’s judgments of good/bad and fair/unfair. This is certainly an area of interest that should be expanded upon in future research to look at the influence of maternal discipline approaches in a transgression-by-transgression analysis.

Maternal Influence on Children’s Judgments

Although the Piagetian model of how younger and older children differ in their use of intention in moral decision making has been extensively studied, how adult judgments may affect children's moral thinking, however, has received much less attention within a Piagetian framework. The present study therefore was designed to investigate the influence of maternal reaction to a transgression on children's judgments of good and bad. Based on Piagetian theory, it was expected that young children would place great value on maternal reaction when judging if a behavior is good or bad, even when this evaluation is in regard to their own transgressions. Older children, however, are likely to place less value on maternal reaction, especially if that reaction is viewed as inappropriate or unfair. In a study exploring judgments about moral intentionality and consequences, Saltzstein, Weiner, and Munk (1995, as cited in Turiel, 1998) found that when judging maternal fairness, children weigh maternal evaluation against their own judgments of the situation. Children look for a congruency between intention and outcome in maternal evaluations of transgressions; specifically mothers were deemed to be more unfair when they disapprove of a

well-intentioned act. In the present study, therefore, I expected that older children would largely judge mothers to be fair if there was a congruency between intentions and maternal reaction, and they would alternatively judge mothers to be unfair if maternal reaction was inappropriately paired with the child's intentions in a transgression situation. In this way, the child’s own moral beliefs serve as a template against which parent’s reactions are judged as to fairness.

Much of the Piagetian research in the past has looked as consequences of actions in terms of material damage and children's judgments of such damage. However, as Suls, Gutkin, and Kalle (1979) point out, “...the consequences of an action may involve another component, the social reaction it elicits. That is, do others excuse or punish an individual for his behavior?” (p. 874). One of the few studies examining the impact of social reaction and intent cues on moral judgment was a study conducted by Costanzo, Coie, and Farnill (1973). Their findings indicate that young children did, in fact, use intent information, but only when the social reaction (parents’) was positive, and not when the reaction was negative. In a recent unpublished research study evaluating the impact of maternal reaction and intention on children's judgments of good and bad, Johnston and Saltzstein (2010) found that young (heteronomous) thinkers tended to globally use maternal reaction as their moral guide, while ignoring the intentions of the fictitious child, while in contrast, older children did followed a completely different pattern. Older children judged a mother's reaction as “fair” *when her reaction matched the fictitious child's intentions*, *but as “unfair” when it*

did not. If the mother's reaction did not match the intentions, including bad intentions, then older children viewed her as “unfair”, even if the outcome was good. Younger children, however did not follow this pattern of judgment. Younger children (under seven years of age) tended to judge the mother's reaction as “fair” when her reaction was positive, regardless of the fictive child's intentions. For them, intention did not appear to play a role in their fairness judgments. Furthermore, younger children also appeared to use the mother's reaction as a guide for their own decision-making when judging a behavior to be good or bad. This study demonstrated that younger and older children are using very different rules for making judgments about maternal fairness and the findings were therefore the foundation for the current study which sought to evaluate this phenomenon fuller and within the context of both hypothetical and real-life transgressions.

In Hoffman's (1983, as cited in Eisenberg & Murphy, 1995) theory of moral development, Eisenberg states that “disciplinary encounters with parents are central to moral internalization” (p. 231). The means by which a parent intervenes in a moral encounter serves as a future reference for the child when making their own moral decisions. But a factor that is not captured in the literature is what happens when a parent is wrong? What if the parent only witnessed part of a transgression and not the mitigating circumstances of the transgressing child? Parents often react to the victim without considering that perhaps the transgressor was either a victim him/herself or may have even had good intentions that did not result in good outcomes because of circumstances. Do

children in those situations differentiate parental interventions as fair or unfair? Or do they simply accept the reaction of an authority figure as appropriate? Although there is an abundance of research on moral development, the research on children’s evaluations of real-life transgressions remains limited, and even more limited is the understanding of how children evaluate parental fairness in real-life transgressions. Thus, in the present study, I focused on children’s moral judgments of their interactions within the parent-child disciplinary encounter and their evaluations of maternal reactions as fair or unfair for the transgression.

Piaget (1932) and Sullivan (1953, as cited in Youniss, 1980) provide some insight into the nuanced understanding of parent-child relationships and the resulting socialization. Sullivan (1953, as cited in Youniss, 1980) describes that

> The parent is an evaluating person who monitors children's acts, offering approval or withholding it in order to shape future acts. The role of the evaluator is described as natural or normal given the whole which most parents attribute to themselves. It is to help their offspring in the task of becoming socialized. To this end, parents attempt to pass on what they know and what they have learned about society (p.272).

Thus, when parents react to a child's transgressions, they are imparting their own moral and social knowledge in an effort to teach their children how to behave appropriately. One of the most fundamental goals of parenting is to have children internalize these social and moral values, yet we know certain parental techniques lend themselves to better internalization.

Domain Theory

Another factor that has been shown to impact children's evaluations of parental fairness is the domain in which the parental disciplinary interaction takes place. These varying domains include Moral, Prudential, Personal, and Social-Conventional situations (e.g., Turiel, 1988; 1993). The Moral domain is of central interest in the present research, as parental discipline has been shown to have an impact on children’s internalization of values (Hoffman, 1975; Grusec & Kuczynski, 1997). According to Smetana’s (1997) discussion of the Moral domain

> Morality pertains to the system of rules that regulates the social interactions and social relationships of individuals within societies. Morality is based on the concepts of welfare (harm), trust, justice (comparative treatment and distribution), and rights and is defined as individuals’ prescriptive understanding of how individuals ought to behave toward each other (p.166).

However, I will also examine how the research questions pertain to other modes of thought, such as Social-Conventional, Prudential, and Personal.

Parents are usually the first moral socializing agents in a child’s life and children of various ages seem to recognize parental authority in the Moral domain over the other domains in domain theory. Although the current study would have liked to focus on moral transgressions alone, it was recognized that many of the day-to-day, real-life transgressions between parents and children were likely to fall into the category of one of the other three domains. Since this

was likely to happen, I decided to evaluate whether any differences are found between children’s evaluations of both maternal fairness and good versus bad as a function of the domain in which the transgression took place. The other domains I expected to find, and found, in the reported transgressions included: 1) Social-Conventional domain where rules are viewed as arbitrary and mutually agreed upon within a social system (Turiel, 1983), 2) the Personal domain where children feel that they have the right to their own choices and preferences regarding issues not directly pertaining to others (Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1997; Turiel, 1983), and 3) the Prudential domain which is related to physical health and avoiding harm to oneself (Tisak & Turiel, 1984). Smetana, Rote, Jambon, Tasopoulos-Chan, Villalobos, and Comer (2012) discuss how according to domain theory, children’s understanding of morality develops, in part, as a function of their social interactions with others and their resulting personal experience of the consequences of those interactions. It is an essential belief underlying this research that how parents react to children’s transgressions within and between varying domains has an impact of children’s interpretations of right and wrong between and across domains.

According to domain theorists, starting at about three or four years of age, children distinguish one domain from the other. They also perceive moral transgressions to be generally “more wrong” than transgressions occurring in other domains (Killen & Hart, 1995; Smetana, 2006a; Turiel, 1998). In addition to gaining the ability to distinguish among domains, previous domain-specific research also informs us that children differentially evaluate fairness of mother's

discipline reactions as a function of the domain in which the maternal reaction occurs (Moral, Social-Conventional, Personal, or Prudential) and that they see mothers and other adult authorities having more legitimate power in the Moral domain versus other domains (Smetana, 1995, Smetana 2006(b); Turiel, 1983). Furthermore, children of various ages deem parents to have more or less authority based on domain. Specifically, younger children believe parents have legitimate authority in more Personal or Social-Conventional matters, while older children do not (Smetana, 2006(b); Turiel, 1998, Turiel, 2002). In Turiel's discussion (1998) of Grusec and Goodnow (1994), he states that “...because children's judgments differ for different types of misdeeds, (e.g., moral as opposed to conventional transgressions; Turiel, 1983 and Nucci, 1984), they will evaluate and judge the appropriateness of the reasons given by parents, or others, when disciplining the child (as shown in research by Killen, 1991 and Nucci, 1984)” (p. 881). Turiel (1998) goes on to specifically point out that children are more likely to respond to adult directives when adults appeal to the welfare of others rather than just pointing out rule violations. It appears that even when the domain may be in one specific area (e.g., Social-Conventional for an act such as stealing), if adults appeal to the child by pointing out the harm to others (e.g., how the act of stealing doesn't just break Social-Conventional rules but how it hurts the person who had something stolen), children are more likely to internalize the directive and view it as a moral concern. Thus, there may be an interaction of sort between certain constructs within various domains and the approach parents use when reasoning with their children. Children are therefore

evaluating parents not only within the domain itself, but also as a function of the discipline style used in discussing the transgression. The present study took note of this and carefully examined parental discussion when coding for domain and maternal discipline approach.

Intention and Outcome

Another purpose of the present study was to further determine how intention and outcome variations, as well as maternal reaction to a transgression, impact children’s judgments of both moral behavior and maternal fairness. My previous research study determined that children of varying ages rate good/bad and fair/unfair differently not only as a function of an understanding of intention and outcome as Piaget suggests, but they also consider maternal reaction to a transgression when making these judgments (Johnston & Saltzstein, 2010). In my earlier study, it was determined that young children not only focus on the direct outcome of an act, but that they rely heavily on maternal reaction, *which is an outcome in and of itself*, when judging a transgression to be good or bad. For example, when an act has good intentions and a bad outcome and the mother in that story has a negative reaction, the younger children (ages 3 - 6) judged the protagonist to have committed a bad act. If the mother of the same story has a positive reaction to the transgression, young children sometimes ignore outcome and base their good/bad judgments on the mother’s reaction, thus deeming the behavior to be more good. Older, autonomous-thinking children did not rely on maternal reaction at all when making judgments of good and bad. As Piaget outlined, Johnston and Saltzstein (2010) found that older children (ages 7 - 11)

based their moral judgments primarily on the intention of an act and discounted outcome and maternal reaction.

The Johnston and Saltztsein (2010) study further revealed that when making judgments of maternal fairness, younger and older children appear to make such judgments based on very different criteria. Results indicated that older children judged mothers to be fair when her reaction to a transgression matched the intentionality of the actor in the story. For example, if there is a story with good intentions and a bad outcome, older children only judged mothers to be fair when her reaction was positive, thus focusing on the good intentions. Furthermore, older children judged mothers to be unfair when her reaction was in line with the outcome, disregarding intentionality. Conversely, younger children evaluated maternal fairness very differently. They judged mothers to be fair only when her reaction was positive and unfair when mother’s reaction was negative. Thus, they appear not to considered anything else (such as intention or outcome) when making these fairness judgments. The present study sought to further examine these findings and continue to document these judgments.

Real-Life Encounters

Another factor making the current study particularly interesting, is that children in this study evaluated their own transgressions, a phenomenon rarely studied to date. There are relatively few studies (Takagi & Saltzstein, 2008) in the moral development literature that have young children evaluate actual, real-life transgressions that they themselves have experienced within the context of the parent-child relationship.

Yet, as Kochanska, Padavich, and Koenig (1996) point out, “the correspondence between children's responses to hypothetical dilemmas and actual moral behavior is weak or inconsistent; nevertheless, children's responses to stories or vignettes are often treated as the reflection of moral development and moral sensibility” (pp. 1420-1421). Kohlberg (1969) assumed that using hypothetical moral dilemmas allowed researchers to see the optimal levels of moral reasoning ability children are capable of at different stages of development. Consequently, a vast number of studies examining children's moral judgments have, in fact, utilized Kohlbergian-type research dilemmas that require the child to decide what makes a behavior good or bad and perhaps to explain their reasoning and justify their conclusions (e.g., Walker, de Vries, & Trevethan, 1987). Thus, our knowledge of the development of moral reasoning have overwhelmingly relied on hypothetical vignettes in which the child must judge an unknown protagonist's behavior as good or bad and decide what behavior would be morally justified. The goal of these vignettes is an aim to establish the maximal level of moral reasoning at which a child is functioning, based on the child's justifications for their decision. As Kochanska, et al. (1996) point out, “the relation between children's thoughts and feelings about moral issues revealed in response to hypothetical situations and their actual conduct remains one the fundamental thorny issues in research on conscience” (p. 1420). Thus, a central aim of the current research project was to determine how children evaluate transgressions that are part of their actual, real-life experience within the family and also how they evaluate maternal reaction to such transgressions.

Among the limited number of research studies that do use actual moral transgressions, is a study conducted by Smetana, Toth, Cicchetti, Bruce, Kane, and Daddis (1999). In their study of maltreated and non-maltreated preschoolers, they found that moral judgments of the children varied as a function of both the type of transgression and whether the transgression was hypothetical or actual. They found that both maltreated and non-maltreated children tended to evaluate hypothetical situations similarly, but there were differences in maltreated and non-maltreated children's evaluations of actual real-life transgressions. Additionally, moral transgressions were viewed as worse and deserving of consequences when the judgments were made by the victim versus the transgressor and in real-life versus hypothetical situations. Smetana, et al. (1999) concluded that children's moral evaluations are a partly a function of their social experiences, including their experiences of maltreatment. The authors specifically state that:

> When events become contextualized in everyday social interactions, different considerations, such as the child's relationship to the transgressor or victim, the potentially extenuating circumstances surrounding the event, or the consequences of the actions such as the sanctions that are applied may affect children's judgments. Thus, children's judgments regarding actual moral transgressions may reflect their attempts to weigh and coordinate moral concerns with the different considerations (pp. 278-279).

Their study lends weight to the argument that affect and social experience play a significant role in how children construct their moral evaluations. It furthermore highlights the need for moral researchers to explore the largely untraveled path of examining children's responses to real-life transgressions.

Maternal Discipline Style

Although parents may share a similar goal of raising moral and socially appropriate children, research on parenting highlights great variations in parental disciplinary practices and strategies (Baumrind, 1971). Overall, the parenting literature suggests that parents who are classified as Authoritative – setting boundaries and rules while allowing for affection and give and take – tend to have children who are more likely to internalize parental values. It has also been shown that children of Authoritarian parents – using power assertion and overly strict techniques with little emotional support– tend to have children who are often compliant, yet much less likely to internalize parental prescriptive as their own. Hoffman (1970) also demonstrated that parents who rely on power-assertive discipline techniques such as taking away privileges, physical punishment, and threats of the same have children who have lower levels of moral reasoning. Conversely, he found that parents who use reasoning and induction techniques tend to have children who internalize the parental moral values (Hoffman, 1970; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). In particular, Hoffman (1970) describes that the use of other-oriented induction which draws a child's attention to the consequences of their transgression on others, seems to be a particularly salient method for internalization of parental values.

As Liable and Thompson (2000) point out, “early relationships with caregivers provide the context in which children construct their initial mental representations of the social world – including its moral and cultural conventions...” (p. 1424). As Vygotsky (1978) describes, one of the most influential cultural tools is language. Language and the subsequent discourse that takes place between parents and children provide the background that helps children formulate internal working models of moral issues and social conventions. Liable and Thompson (2000) believe that language may be of particular importance in a child's moral and socio-emotional development. They specifically state that, “the daily conversations a child shares with parents are often imbued with messages about social and moral issues and references to feelings and due to their emotional salience, a child is likely to internalize the messages conveyed in these conversations”. Research on parenting style also lends support to this proposition as it has been found that Authoritative parenting, discipline which is supportive and also provides constraints, is closely related to positive child outcomes, including children's internalization of parental moral values. The use of “other-oriented” induction techniques, which seems similar to what Baumrind termed an Authoritative parenting style may be of particular importance in a child's emerging model of morality.

Dunn (1987) specifically has pointed out that studies have shown that “the experience of growing up with a mother who explains and is concerned about others' feelings is associated with the development of conciliatory behavior, altruistic behavior, and the ability to discuss feeling states as early as two

years” (p. 108). Such Authoritative parenting behaviors seem to sensitize children not only to the needs of others but also in their understanding fairness. The current study was designed to further investigate how discipline style potentially impacts not only children’s moral reasoning, but also their perception of maternal fairness. As previously stated, all of the real-life transgressions that were reported for this study were evaluated in regard to the type of discipline technique utilized by the mother. Previous research by Johnston and Saltzstein (2010) utilized a parenting questionnaire to determine parenting style. That study found that there was little variation in reported discipline style which may have been due to social desirability factors and the restricted nature of the sample (mainly upper-middle class mothers). Based on that finding, the present study instead explored the concept of coding maternal discipline style from self-reported descriptions of transgression interactions. Presumably, this technique is less likely to be subject to a social desirability factor.

In past research examining the effects of parenting style on moral development, researchers have empirically demonstrated that parents who use such induction techniques, as opposed to power assertion, are much more likely to have children who model and internalize parental values (Dunn, Brown, Maguire, 1995; Hoffman, 1970, 1975; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). Again, Kochanska, et al. (1996) further suggest that one of the consequences of power-assertive discipline is that it has the potential to elicit anger, aggression, and a hostile social-cognitive orientation in children which is detrimental to the development of conscience. Using multivariate analysis, Kochanska, et al.

(1996) examined whether maternal discipline had a unique impact on children's measures of conscience and their personal narratives about a moral dilemma. Controlling for the child's sex, age, and level of defiance, it was concluded that maternal power assertion, does in fact, uniquely contribute to not only mother-reported conscience development, but also to observed moral conduct. Mothers who were more likely to use coercive discipline techniques had children who were less internalized (Kochanska, et al., 1996). One of the unique things about the study by Kochanska, et al. (1996) is that it used a normative (ie, non-abusive or depressive) maternal sample. Most research that has examined real-life mother/child influences on moral reasoning development have only looked at maltreated children or depressed mothers (e.g., Chilamkurti & Milner, 1993). Thus, the mothers in the study were not maltreating their children nor were they depressed. Nonetheless, as the authors describe, “the relation between discipline and conscience development appeared to be quite robust” (Kochanska, et al., 1996, p. 1434). The authors further state that this finding may exist because, “...even low-level forceful discipline may cause children to resent their parents and reject their goals, to form external attributions for compliance, and to perceive parental values as forced and not self-generated, and thus to feel little *internal* obligation to comply” (Kochanksa, et al., 1996, p. 1434).

Chilamkurti and Milner (1993) also explored the relationship between parent and child cognitive factors that they hypothesized to be associated with parent-child disciplinary encounters. They examined children's evaluations of

different kinds of transgressions, maternal accounts of different disciplinary techniques, and the mother's report of both the appropriateness and effectiveness of their own discipline. Additionally, and most notable for the present study, they (Chilamkurti & Milner, 1996) also examined children's evaluations of disciplinary techniques used by their own and other mothers. The researchers examined children's transgressions in the Moral, Social-Conventional, and Personal domains and using the disciplinary techniques outlined by Hoffman (1970, 1977), they evaluated whether the maternal discipline utilized power assertion, love withdrawal, or induction. Their study was done with mothers who were considered either high risk or low risk for being abusive toward their children and thus, it was unlike the normative sample examined in the present study. In their research, Chilamkurti and Milner (1996) expected that children of high risk mothers would

> perceive their mother's power assertion disciplinary responses as appropriate irrespective of the nature of the transgression, while children of low risk mothers were expected to perceive the appropriateness of their mother's power assertion disciplinary responses as more or less appropriate as a function of the type of transgression (p. 1805).

The results indicate that in both groups (high and low risk), discipline after a moral transgression was considered appropriate, and although there was no difference between the groups in regard to the Social-Conventional and Personal domains, the high risk mothers and their children did view the transgressions in those domains as “more wrong” than did the low risk group. What the study

appears not to address is the how these different groups of children evaluated maternal fairness. Presumably, mothers were considered “more fair” or appropriate in the Moral domain, but were there differences in acceptability of maternal discipline as a function of age? Did younger children differentially evaluate maternal appropriateness among the varying domains? The present study sought to answer these questions as this appears to be a second gap in the literature pertaining not only in understanding moral development, but also in normative, non-clinical samples of mothers and their children.

Hoffman (1994) addressed some of the issues that are at the heart of the present study’s exploration. He points out that Grusec and Goodnow (1994) suggest that children's perception of the parental intervention as appropriate to the misdeed is important for internalization of values. Hoffman (1994) contends that that this may not be true for very young children, but is likely true for older ones. Very few studies actually explore how young children evaluate maternal fairness and the few that look at children's rating of maternal “appropriateness” do so using hypothetical dilemmas. The present study is thus unique in that it sought to evaluate not only how different types of maternal discipline play a role in children's moral judgments and evaluations of fairness, but also how a child's age and thus, their reasoning ability, affects a child's ability to make such judgments. Further, to my knowledge no studies have examined these issues by utilizing real-life transgressions with a normative sample of mothers. In order to better understand how children make judgments of moral behavior and maternal fairness, we need to explore methods to evaluate these phenomena within the

realm of everyday parent-child interactions and the interpretations children make of those interactions, and finally how those interactions affect moral development.

Piagetian theory suggests that around the sixth or seventh year of life, most children's belief in the omnipotence of adults begins to wane. Children going from the plane of heteronomous to autonomous thinking about morality begin to realize that an act is not necessarily good merely because it was praised or rewarded by an adult (Aldrich & Mancuso, 1976). Kohlberg (1963) has stated that an adult's use of reward or punishment are only influential in children below the age of seven. This is why the present study included children in groups from ages 3 – 6 years of age, and 7 – 12 years of age. It was expected that children in these contrasting age groups will be differentially influenced by maternal reaction to a transgression and will also evaluate the goodness versus badness of the act and fairness versus unfairness of the mother based on different reasoning criteria. Although there is likely little difference between a child of 6 years, 11 months and 7 years of age, there needs to be a delineation between “older” and “younger” children, and thus this served as the line of demarcation based on Kohlberg’s (1963) work.

Thus, two additional areas of preliminary exploration for this study, (1) to determine whether maternal discipline style impacts children evaluations of what makes their own behavior good versus bad in transgression encounters and (2) to also explore how they evaluate maternal reactions to transgressions and how those reactions also influence their own moral evaluations of that act. I believe

that while moral thinking does follow an unfolding path which is in itself constrained, in part, by cognitive development, that this same development is also subject to the influence from parental input and disciplinary practices.

Summary

This study sought to determine how children of varying ages evaluate what makes a behavior good or bad and what makes a mother’s reaction to a transgression fair or not fair. Of consideration are how children's judgments might be affected when the child must judge their own mother and their own transgression. Do children think differently about transgression encounters they have personally experienced? Are mothers only fair when they are “nice” and when they are not disciplining a child? What are the circumstances that allow children to “objectively” evaluate maternal fairness? How are judgments of maternal fairness related to the child’s own evaluative judgments at different ages? Further, do these relationships differ depending on whether the domain in which a transgression takes place and whether the incident is hypothetical or from derived from the real encounters between mother and child? These are the chief questions the present study sought to investigate.

In sum, we know that moral reasoning is a multi-faceted, unfolding process that has many influences. These influences certainly include a child's age-related cognitive reasoning abilities, the domain of the transgression encounter, and potential affects of parental discipline. These factors not only influence how a child reasons moral right from wrong (or good from bad), but also how they interpret whether mothers’ reactions are fair or unfair. While we

know from everyday life that children often claim “That's not fair!”, very little developmental research has examined how it is they make such interpretations of fairness and how these fairness judgments might develop. For these reasons, this study was designed to explore not only some of the presumed contributors to moral development in general, but also the specific concept of how children learn to judge what constitutes fairness. Thus, the present research study was designed to investigate the following questions: 1) what is the relationship between children's age and reasoning in evaluating actions as good or bad depending on whether the event being judged was hypothetical or from real-life, 2) what is the relationship between children's age and features of the moral encounter when judging the reactions of a mother as fair or unfair, 3) do children judge either the transgression or the mother's reaction differently depending on intention/outcome and maternal reaction, and 4) do children’s judgments depend on the domain in which a transgression occurs?

Overall, in the present study the following are hypothesized 1) older and younger children judge maternal fairness differently; 2) older and younger children evaluate good/bad differently; 3) the domain in which the transgression takes place further impacts children’s evaluations of good/bad, and fair/unfair; and, 4) variations of intention/outcome and maternal reaction to a transgression also affect children’s judgments in interaction with the age of the child and whether the situation being judged is hypothetical or from the child’s real-life.

Method

Participants

Participants were 25 mothers and their children. Overall, of the 25 participating mothers, 2 were Hispanic/Latino, 1 was Asian, 1 was multiracial, and the remaining 21 were of European descent. Twenty-three participating mothers were recruited from various schools in the suburbs of New York City and 2 mothers were from the suburbs of Baltimore, Maryland. The mothers in the sample were largely of similar socioeconomic status, educational background, race and ethnicity with the largest majority being college-educated, and upper-middle class. Efforts were made to recruit mothers and their children from more culturally diverse schools in the same area but getting participants proved to be difficult due to the time-consuming nature of the study. Mothers were asked to fill out a form to gather general demographic information. This information included age, race, income, marital status, number of dependents, employment status, and level of education. Although the original plan was to collect data from a total of 50 children ages 3 – 12 years old and their mothers, only thirty mothers signed up, with a total of twenty-five completing the study in its entirety.

The child participants ranged in age from 3 to 12. There were 10 females and 15 males. Participating children were categorized according to age into age groups of 3 – 6 years and 7– 12 years of age for analysis purposes. These age categorizations are based on Piaget's theory of the approximate developmental table for the shift from heteronomous to autonomous thinking, as well as his and Kohlberg’s belief that the parental beliefs and practices may have differential

influence at these points in development. Although there was concern expressed over the delineation in older versus younger age groups, Bearison and Isaccs (1975, as cited in Siegal, 1982) stated that while six year olds may be capable of examining intentionality when making moral judgments, they appear to not spontaneously do so unless it is suggested by others. Additionally, this split in age conveniently allowed for a comparison of thirteen younger children versus twelve older children in the data analysis.

Mothers were recruited via letters sent to them describing the nature of the study. Additionally, more mothers were recruited with ads placed on local parenting message boards and Craig's List. This was done in an effort to bring more diversity to the maternal sample demographics; however, many respondents were only interested in participating if a study which paid for participation. This needs to be a consideration going forward to gather more mothers and children, especially for purposes of a more diverse sample.

In addition to these methods, two children's stores on Long Island also distributed information and consent forms to patrons who were interested. All participating mothers were entered in a lottery to win a $250 Visa gift card. The chances of winning were 1 in 25. The lottery was used motivate the participants given the time-consuming nature of the study. Many mothers were concerned about the time-consuming nature of filling out journal entries and this was sighted as the reason for either not signing up at all or, in a few cases, for not completing the study. It became apparent during recruitment efforts that although the lottery

was attractive, in order to increase the sample size in the future participants will need more incentive to sign up for a study of this nature.

Procedure

Once mothers returned the consent form indicating their wish to participate along with their children, the researcher contacted them to discuss the study and find out their preferences for participation. Similar to the methods used by Tagaki and Saltzstein (2008), mothers were asked to keep a daily journal of the actual transgression encounters they have experienced with their children over a two week period (see Appendix A). They were asked to fill out these journal forms for each child participating with them in this study. Mothers were given the choice of having the transgression journal log emailed to them daily in order to fill it out online or to have a paper journal mailed to them via the regular mail once a week. All participating mothers chose to have the journal form emailed to them daily.

Participating mothers were asked to keep a journal of the discipline encounters they experienced with their children over a period of at least two weeks. It was expected that since there might be missed days of journal records, two weeks was the designated period in order to gather multiple transgression stories. After collecting some pilot data, it was decided to allow mothers extra time to complete the two weeks total if they so desired. For example, mothers could take a week off if they needed to and come back to writing again. A number of mothers indicated they were interested in participating, but were concerned about the daily time commitment. In order to accommodate

participants, mothers were told that they could take their time, although the two week time frame was ideal in order to keep from delaying the completion of the study. Thus, in order to be more accommodating, forms were sent over a period longer than two weeks when necessary. Allowing mothers to fill out forms as they had time rather than everyday took the pressure off and allowed for more participation. Mother’s received forms anywhere from daily over two weeks to daily over one month. The daily journal emails were sent to them as a reminder to keep them participating until a number of stories are collected. Mothers had to submit a minimum of three stories in order to have their child participate in the study. Mother’s journal entries varied in number from three to twenty. The mothers who filled out more journal entries than needed often commented that they enjoyed the process of reflecting on how they handled transgressions. The goal of collecting at least fourteen entries was to be able to have a number of encounters in varying domains for the researcher to choose from and to write the stories to read to each child when meeting with the children at a later date. After a period of at least two weeks, or when three or more entries had been submitted, the researcher chose stories from varying domains. When only three stories were submitted, the researcher still used those stories and participating children since the number of participants was small. Even when a mother submitted multiple entries, it was still not always possible to include stories of different domains. It should be noted that many of the stories had a similar and recurring flavor to across child-parent pairs. Still, when possible, I chose stories from three different domains (Moral, Social-Conventional and Prudential) in order

to try to look for domain effects in the analysis. See Appendix A for the complete journal form for mothers.

Once the participating mothers completed their two weeks or more of transgression-journaling, I read through the depicted discipline encounters and picked three reports from each parent to create into storybook format to read to the children. I attempted to choose stories that might have a good intention or bad intention encounter format to them if possible although encounters with these features were rarely encountered. If no such stories were available to use, then I tried to choose other types of stories in the Moral domain, Personal domain, Social-Conventional domain, and Prudential domain for the next phase of the study. Again, the goal in choosing real-life stories was based on trying to pick three different domains. This was not always possible given the nature of the data. Based on pilot data it had appeared that many of the stories would not be moral in nature, at least in the strict sense of the term, but occurred in other domains as described in domain theory. However, eventually I found that while the majority of the stories collected were Social-Conventional, there were, in fact, many stories in the Moral domain. Stories were analyzed by their content to classify them as Moral, Social-Conventional, Personal, or Prudential in nature. All collected stories were coded by two independent coders and were analyzed for both domain and overall discipline style. The stories were coded by domain according to from the perspective of the mother. For example, a story about doing homework might be viewed as a Social-Conventional story from a mother’s perspective, but as a personal story from a child’s perspective. Given these

possibilities, we stayed consistent by coding only from the mother’s perspective. This was consistent with the criterion used by Takagi and Satzstein (2008). Although the primary interest for this study focused on the Moral domain, upon analysis we sought to determine how children evaluate both maternal fairness and good versus bad as a function of domain and determine how maternal discipline style might or might not mediate this relationship.

In addition to three stories based on each child’s actual, real-life transgression encounters, each child also heard prototypical/hypothetical stories that had not necessarily happen to them. Three hypothetical stories were included. One story was chosen from a commonality of submitted encounters that was understandable across age groups. This story was about a mother not allowing a child to wear shorts and flip flops in cold weather. It was coded as Social-Conventional since the story was rule-based. The mother in this hypothetical story story did not mention the dangers of wearing these clothing articles in the cold and instead just spoke of how they could not be worn. The other two hypothetical stories used were chosen from the researcher’s earlier study on children’s evaluations of good/bad and fair/unfair (Johnston & Saltzstein, 2010). These stories were used because they had a component of intentionality/outcome and a mismatch with maternal reaction. Additionally, these stories were considered plausible scenarios that children of all ages could potentially encounter, plus the stories covered the Moral and Prudential domains. The hypothetical Moral story entailed a story about a protagonist with a bad intention, good outcome, and then a positive reaction from the mothers (BI/GO/+;

Verbatim in Appendix B). In this story, the protagonist is angry at a friend and with bad intent, decides to push the friend in the mud. While acting on this bad intention, the protagonist inadvertently saves the friend from running into the busy road. The protagonist’s mother praises the child for his actions completely ignoring the bad intention component. In the hypothetical Prudential story (GI/BO/-; Verbatim in Appendix C), the protagonist wants to be nice to his sibling and help the sibling go on a slide that they love. The intention is good, but the sibling falls of the slide and is crying. The protagonist’s mother completely ignores the good intentions of the protagonist and punishes him with a time-out. Thus, this is a Prudential story with a good intention, bad outcome, negative maternal reaction.

Again, these prototypical/hypothetical stories were Moral, Prudential, and Social-Conventional in nature. These stories were included to ensure that we gathered information on children's evaluations from multiple domains so we could later compare the differences in response based on domain, age, and maternal discipline style. Additionally, the use of hypothetical stories in varying domains also allowed for comparison to real-life encounters. Specifically, we were able to compare whether real-life stories are judged differently than hypothetical stories in terms of both good/bad and fair/unfair across domains and ages.

For the real-life transgression encounters, three of the reported real-life transgression incidents for each participant were rewritten into a storybook format that was read to the children by the researcher at a later date. These stories were each placed in a mini-binder with a decorative cover and cartoon-

like illustrations on every story page. The researcher met with each child individually either at the child’s home or a convenient location such as a public library. After the researcher introduced herself to the child, it was explained that the researcher had some stories and wanted to know if it would be ok to read the child the stories and ask some questions about what they think about the stories. Each child gave verbal assent prior to participating. Once consent had been obtained, the six stories (three actual transgressions they experienced and three hypotheticals) were read one at a time with questions directly following each story before beginning the next. After hearing each story, the child was asked if the child in the story did something good or bad and if the mother in the story was fair or not fair. For each of these questions, the child was also asked to indicate on a 5-point smile-face scale how fair or unfair and how good or bad they rated their answer. The smile-face scale consisted of five faces that ranged from a large frown progressing through to a large smile.

Prior to hearing the six stories, all children were trained on the smile face scale. They were shown the scale and asked to point which face was the happiest, which was a little happy, which was very sad and which was a little sad. They were also asked to indicate which face wasn’t sad or happy. Each child was then asked to show which face would mean *very good, good, bad or very, bad* and the neutral face of *not good or* bad. This was done for fair and unfair, as well. All the children in the study did this task with ease. After hearing each story and verbally stating if the child in the story did something good or bad, the researcher asked the child to point to the face that showed how good or bad. If

the child had verbally indicated “bad” the researcher responded, “Which face shows how bad you think the child was?” The same process was used for evaluations of maternal fairness. After the child verbally indicated if they thought the mother in the story was fair or not fair, they were asked to point to the face the showed how fair or not fair. Children were not asked to elaborate on these judgments, but if they spontaneously commented on their decisions, these anecdotal notes were written down.

The names and minor details of the real-life stories were changed so that while they child may have recognized the encounter happened to them, they did not think it was necessarily about them. For example, if the actual transgression was about a child spilling milk, the story transgression might be about orange juice instead. Additionally, the name of the child in the story was different than the name of the actual child, but the story protagonist was of the same gender and age. The purpose of the minor changes to the real-life stories was to make the story sound familiar, but not have the child recognize it was specifically their own.

In addition to coding the stories for domain type, stories were also evaluated to categorize the type of discipline strategy used by the mother. Stories were carefully evaluated for any specific power assertion, love withdrawal, inductive reasoning and/or other disciplinary techniques employed by the mothers (e.g., Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). Overall discipline style of the mothers was evaluated based on all the transgression stories presented during the journaling phase. Mothers overall discipline style was assessed roughly

based on the styles outlined by Baumrind (1971) but the mothers were rated for their discipline approaches overall across reported transgression encounters (i.e., tending to use power assertion or reasoning). While it is recognized that maternal discipline itself may vary as a function of domain and other social and emotional factors at the time of the transgression, the coders looked for the most commonly reported discipline methods for each mother when coding for maternal discipline style. Mothers with more power assertive and physical discipline approaches than other approaches were coded as Authoritarian for the purposes of this study. Mothers who routinely gave into demands and didn’t set boundaries or follow through in their negotiations (i.e., “You can have a cookie after dinner”, but then they give in and allow a cookie before dinner to make the child stop throwing a fit) with their child were rated as Indulgent. Mothers who engaged in reasoning and extensive explanations while providing affection and boundaries were rated as Authoritative. Again, these codes for maternal discipline style were based on the sum of overall transgressions reported by the mother. The goal of this was to determine if children evaluate fairness and good versus bad differently as a function of maternal discipline style in the transgression story and as a function of the type/domain of the transgression, as well. Thus, the parents were coded for both maternal discipline style and story domain. Again, these evaluations were coded by a second coder to establish reliability.

In sum, the purpose of this study is to analyze how a child's age, domain of transgression encounter, and the intention/outcome and maternal response

influence children's evaluations of good versus bad behavior and fair-unfair judgments of the maternal reactions.

Measures

The journal stories submitted by mothers were coded in order to classify them according to domain theory as Moral, Social-Conventional, Personal, or Prudential in nature. Two coders independently read and categorized each journal submission based on the characteristics as outlined by domain theory, adopting the perspective of the mother. Of the total of 75 real-life stories read to the children, the coders agreed in 73 cases, or 97.33% of the time, as to what category the domain should be classified as. After the independent coding, the raters went back and together reexamined the stories on which they did not agree and discussed the discrepancies. A mutual categorization was agreed upon after discussion and further evaluation. Additionally, overall maternal discipline style was evaluated for discipline style features according to the descriptions by Baumrind of Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive (Indulgent) parenting styles. The discipline style categorization was based on the overall style of the maternal discipline approach based on analyzing each mother’s entire set of submission of transgression encounters. Reading all the transgression entries for each mother allowed for a fuller picture of her discipline style beyond just the scope of the three stories used for her child’s participation. Once again, two coders, including the researcher and a clinical psychologist, read through all of the journal submissions for each mother and maternal discipline style was coded based on the overall style most often exhibited. The

independent coders agreed on maternal discipline style for 22 out of 25 mothers, which was an agreement of 88% initially. After the independent coding, the raters once again went back and together reexamined and discussed the small discrepancies to come to a mutually agreed upon discipline style for each of the mother participants.

All participating children were read a total of six stories. Three stories were hypothetical and three were from the child’s own real-life transgression encounters. All stories were written to match the gender of the individual child to the protagonist of the story. The children were read the stories in a random order, with the constraint that the real-life stories and hypothetical stories alternated. After each story, the child indicated if the child in the story did something good or bad and if the mother in the story was fair or not fair. A 5-point smile-face scale was used allowing the child to indicate the level of good/bad and fair/unfair.

Based on the measures above, this study then sought to examine how children’s judgments of good and bad behavior and fair and unfair maternal discipline are influenced by age, the child’s own experience of maternal discipline style, and the domain in which a transgression takes place. Furthermore, this study also sought to evaluate if children evaluate good/bad and fair/unfair differently in real-life versus hypothetical transgressions. Finally, this study examined how intentions, outcome, and maternal reaction play a role in such evaluations and compares these findings with previous ones.

Results

Reliability Analysis

Two coders independently coded the real-life and hypothetical transgression stories for story domain. Stories were coded as taking place in one of four domains. They were classified as either Personal, Moral, Social-Conventional, or Prudential. A total of 75 stories were coded for domain with agreement on 73 out of 75 cases, thus the percentage of agreement between coders was 97.33%. We computed a Cohen’s Kappa coefficient to assess the reliability of these codings. The results of the inter-rater analysis for story domain agreement yielded a Kappa = 0.905, with $p < .001$. This Kappa value indicates a very strong level of agreement between coders when rating story domains. Overall, three stories were classified as Personal, twenty-four were Moral, forty-two were Social-Conventional, and six were Prudential.

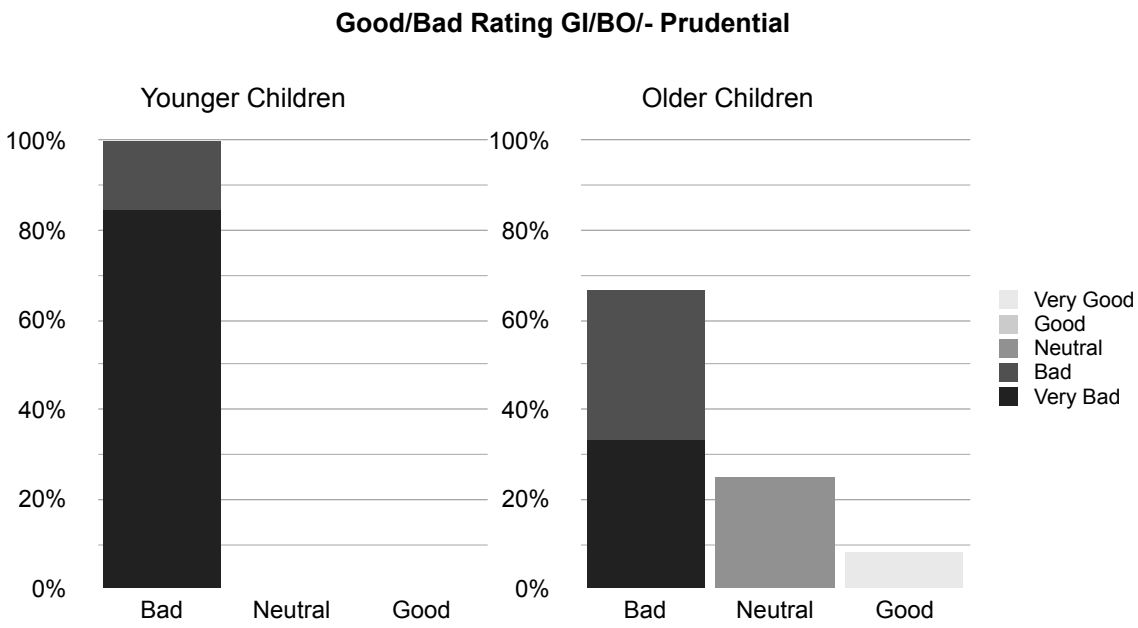
Intention/Outcome and Maternal Response

As mentioned, previous research had found that younger and older children evaluate bad/good and maternal fairness differently depending on the protagonist’s intention, the story outcome and the reaction of the fictitious mother in the story (Johnston & Saltzstein, 2010). Previous research indicated that older children evaluate mothers to be fair when there is a match between intention and maternal reaction. Essentially, older children judged mothers as more fair when the maternal reaction matches a protagonist’s intentions as opposed to the outcome, *even judging mother who approved bad intended act as not fair*. Additionally, older children also judged acts to be good or bad based on

intentions rather than outcome. Younger children, alternatively, evaluate good/bad and fairness very differently and often focused solely on outcome and/or maternal reaction in making their judgments. In the present study I sought to replicate these findings, exploring age differences in judgments of good/bad and fair/unfair as a function of intention, outcome, and maternal reaction.

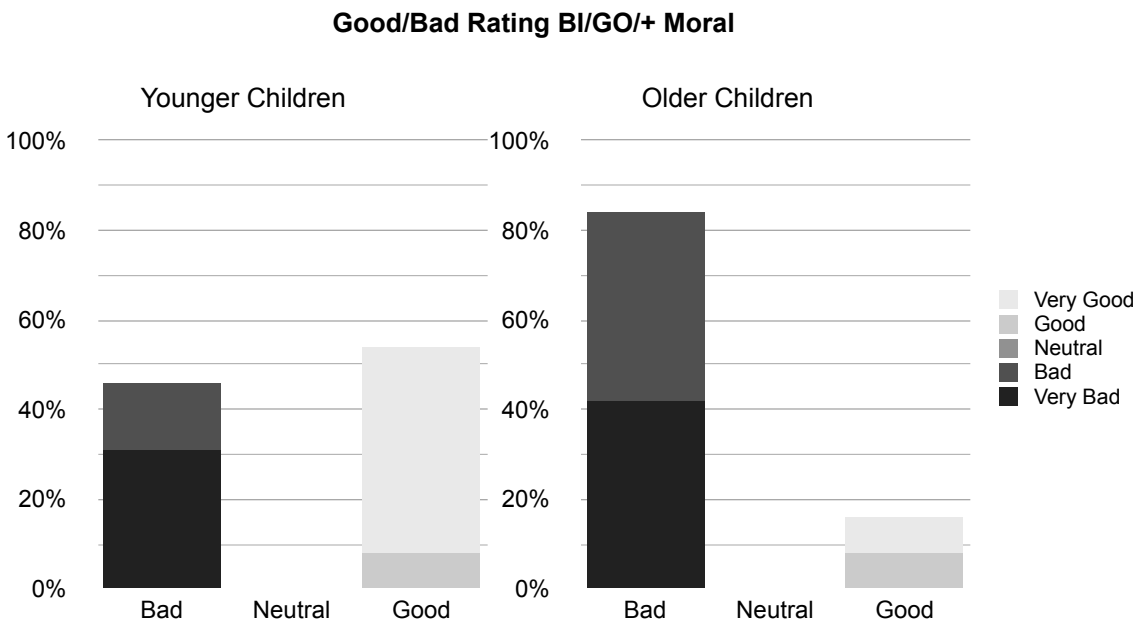
Two of the three hypothetical stories had mismatches between intention/outcome and maternal reaction. In the good intention, bad outcome, negative maternal reaction story (GI/BO/-), results indicate that younger and older children judged the protagonists behavior differently. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to evaluate if judgments of good/bad in the GI/BO/- story differed as a function of age. The results of the test show that younger children judge the act to be significantly worse (i.e., more “bad”) than older children, $U = 34.00$, $p = .006$. See Figure 1 for frequency distribution of good/bad evaluations by age group.

Figure 1



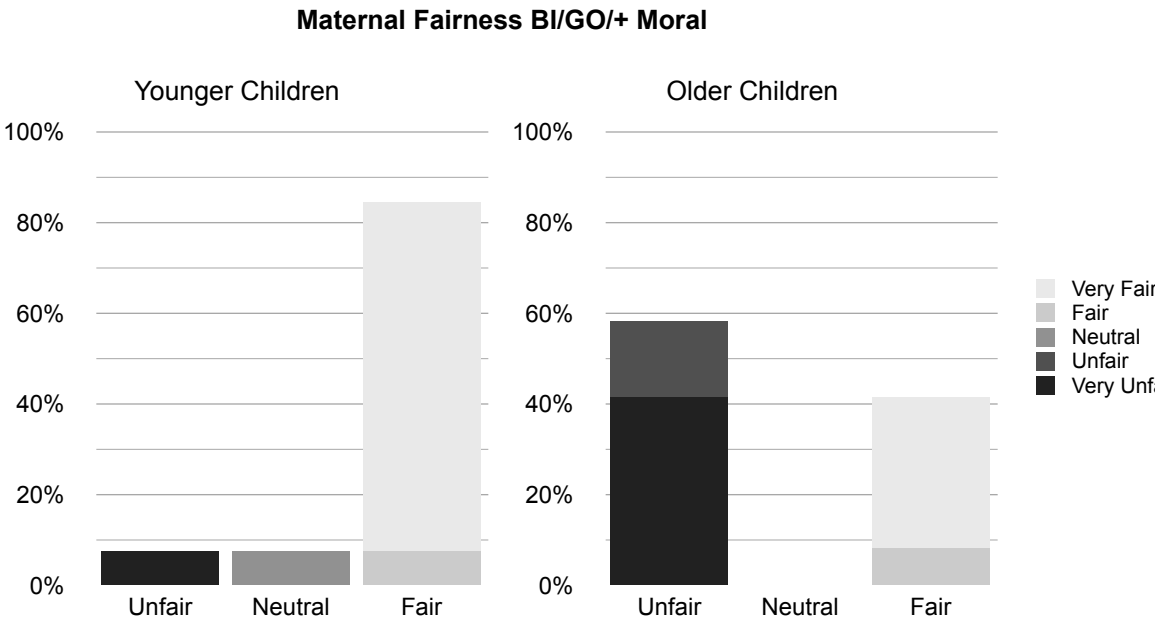
Interestingly, despite indications from previous research (Johnston & Saltzstein, 2008), a Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant differences for good/bad judgments as a function of age for the bad intention, good outcome, positive maternal reaction (BI/GO/+) story. Since this is a small data set and the distribution was in the expected direction, it’s possible the difference would have been significant if we had more participants. See Figure 2 for frequency distribution of good/bad evaluations by age group for this BI/GO/+ story.

Figure 2



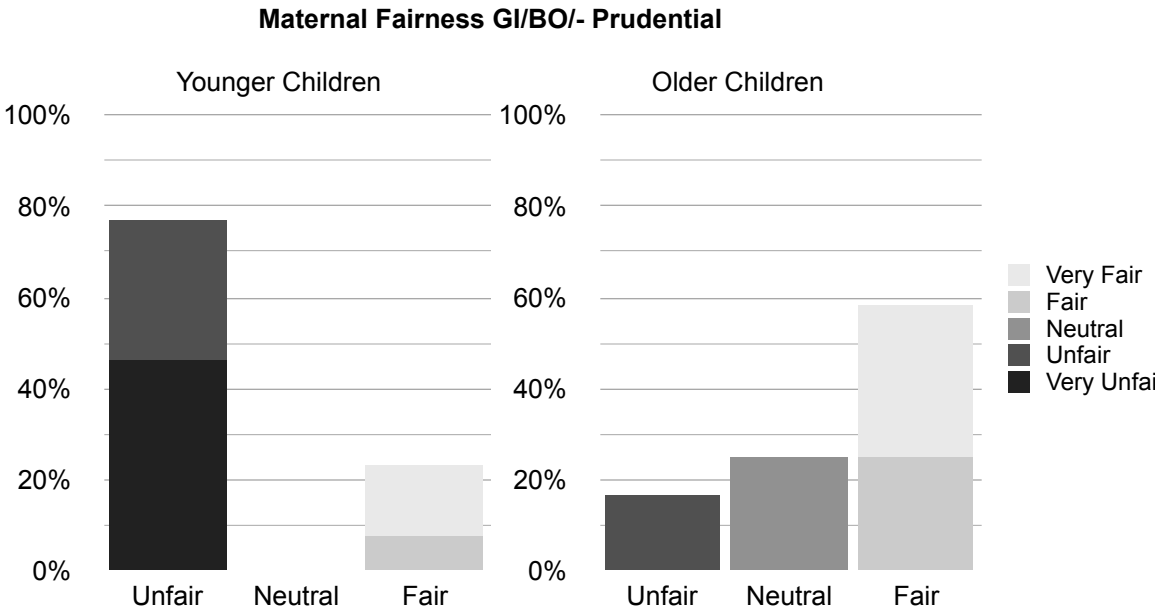
In addition to evaluating the GI/BO/- and the BI/GO/+ stories for children's judgments of good and bad, we also sought to evaluate whether children in younger versus older age groups differentially evaluate maternal fairness in these two hypothetical stories. A Mann-Whitney U-test for the BI/GO/+ story indicates that there are significant age differences when judging maternal fairness for this story, $U = 117.000$, $p = .035$. Specifically, as predicted, it was found that younger children tended to judge the mother's positive reaction to be very fair, while older children show more of an even split in their judgments. See Figure 3 for frequency distribution of fair/unfair evaluations by age group for this BI/GO/+ story. Note that the older children judged the mother as unfair *even though she was praising the fictive actor in the story who produced a good outcome despite bad intentions.*

Figure 3



Results also indicate differences in judgments of fairness as a function of age for the GI/BO/- story (Figure 4). A Mann-Whitney U test reveals that for this story, younger children judged the fictitious mother to be significantly less fair than older children, $U = 30.500$, $p = .008$. Thus, it appears that younger children seem to indicate that a negative maternal reaction is not fair, even though nearly all young children judged the protagonist’s behavior to be bad. However, older children did not evaluate fairness for this story as expected. This will also be addressed in the discussion section.

Figure 4

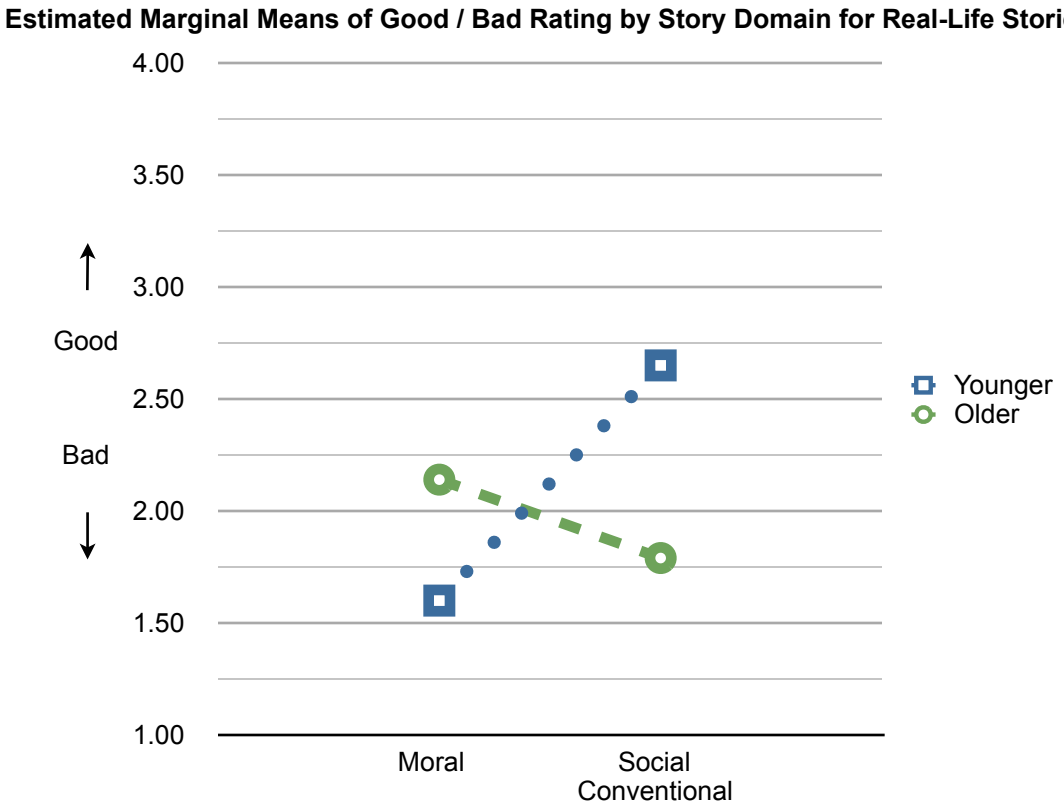


Domain Influence within Real-Life Stories

It was of interest to the present study to determine if children’s evaluations of stories for good/bad and fair/unfair differ both as a function of the story domain and the child’s age, and because possible variations in veiled real-life stories versus completely hypothetical stories has not been established, it was decided to compare results within real-stories separately from results in hypothetical stories. As noted earlier, of the total real-life stories collected, only 3 were coded as Personal and only 6 were coded to be Prudential. Given these small samples, comparisons were only made for the real-life Moral and real-life Social-Conventional stories. In order to be included in these comparisons, a child had to have at least one story in each of these domains. If a child had more than one story in one of these domains, their good/bad and fair/unfair ratings for that particular domain were averaged. Repeated measures ANOVA was performed

and revealed that older and younger children significantly differed in how they contrasted the rating of good/bad in real-life moral and real-life Social-Conventional stories (F = 7.375, df = 1,15, p = .016, Eta = .330). The results suggest that younger children judged their own behavior to be more good when the real-life transgression is Social-Conventional compared to older children's good/bad judgments in this domain which tend to be more harsh. However, older children appear to judge real-life moral transgressions to be more good than do younger children. See Figure 5 below.

Figure 5



Children's evaluations of real-life stories were further examined using pairwise t-tests. These results indicate that younger children judged real-life

moral (*M* = 1.60, *SD* = .937) and real-life Social-Conventional (*M* = 2.65, *SD* = 1.651) stories very differently from one another on the good/bad dimension *t*(9) = -2.849, *p* = .019. The younger children evaluated the transgressor in the real-life Moral stories to be worse than the transgressor in the real-life Social-Conventional stories. Conversely, there were no significant differences in older children’s evaluations of good/bad as a function of domain for the real-life stories.

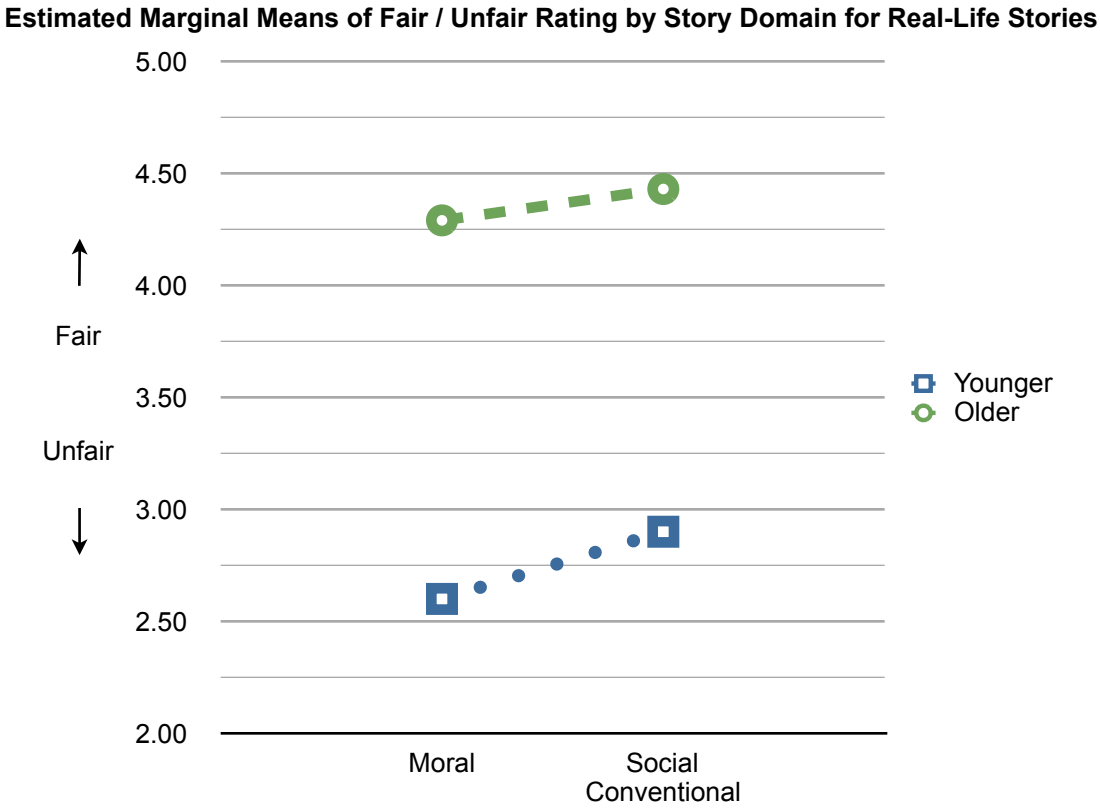
Interestingly, another repeated measures ANOVA revealed that there were no significant differences for how older and younger children rated fair/unfairness of mothers as a function of a story being real-life Moral or real-life Social-Conventional. The results do, however, show that there is a main effect of age in children’s judgments of fairness, such that younger children rate the mother as significantly less fair than older children do (*F* = 13.455, *df* = (1, 15), *p* = .002, *Eta* = .473). See Table 1 below. Figure 6, below, illustrates that regardless of story domain, younger children always rate the mother to be significantly less fair than older children rate her. This may be because these younger children do not understand the reason for the mother’s reaction and therefore consider it arbitrary and unfair, a point to be discussed later.

Table 1

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects - Main Effect of Age in Fairness Judgments

	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	415.977	1	415.977	263.118	0.000	0.946
Young/Old	21.271	1	21.271	13.455	0.002	0.473
Error	23.714	15	1.581			

Figure 6



Domain Influence within Hypothetical Stories

Repeated measures ANOVA was utilized to examine if there were any effects for rating of good/bad in the three hypothetical stories as a function of age and domain. As stated above, rigorous comparisons of real-life and hypothetical stories of this type are left to future research. As such, it was decided to evaluate the influence of domain within hypothetical stories separately from the influence of real-life stories, as reported above. The GI/BO/- story was recategorized as Prudential because the act, although not mal-intended, involved a concern for physical safety concern from the fictive mother's point of view. In contrast, the

BI/GO/+ story was coded as Moral because the act was malevolently intended, and the remaining hypothetical story which did not have any intentionality component was coded as Social-Conventional. The repeated measures ANOVA indicated that the relationship of story domain, as so defined, and good/bad rating, does indeed vary according to age and domain type, (F = 4.153, df = 2, p = .029). Further, these age-by-domain differences were not significant for all the hypothetical domains, but rather were found significant in only one of the three domain types. T-tests reveal that there is a significant difference in good/bad rating as a function of age for the Prudential domain. The older children (M = 2.17, SD = 1.193) evaluated the protagonist in the hypothetical Prudential domain to be significantly more good than do younger children (M = 1.15, SD = . 376) as predicted, t (13)=2.814, p =.015. See Table 2 below. See Figure 7 below.

Figure 7

Estimated Marginal Means of Good / Bad Rating by Story Domain for Hypothetical Stories

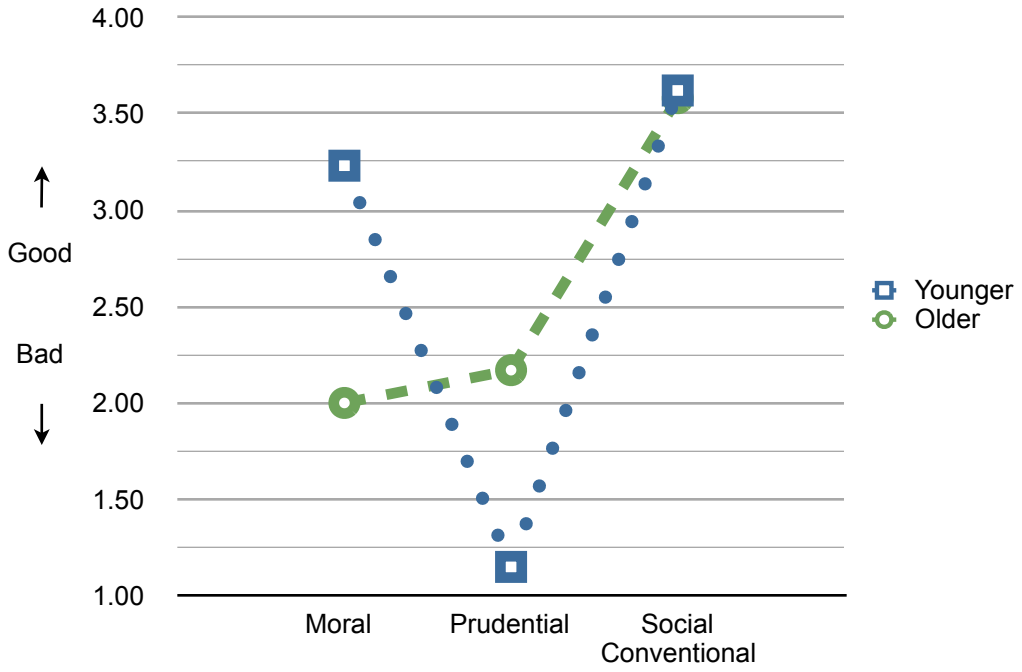


Table 2

Independent Samples Test - Age and Domain for Hypothetical Stories

			Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
										95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tail.)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	Lower	Upper
Good/Bad Hypothetical	Moral	Equal variances assumed	10.003	0.004	-1.899	23.0	0.070	-1.231	0.648	-2.572	0.110
		Equal variances not assumed			-1.928	21.2	0.067	-1.231	0.638	-2.557	0.096
	Prudential	Equal variances assumed	8.104	0.009	2.912	23.0	0.008	1.013	0.348	0.293	1.732
		Equal variances not assumed			2.814	13.0	0.015	1.013	0.360	0.235	1.790
	Social-Conventional	Equal variances assumed	3.611	0.070	-0.052	23.0	0.959	-0.032	0.613	-1.301	1.237
		Equal variances not assumed			-0.053	22.3	0.958	-0.032	0.607	-1.289	1.225

Variations in Story Origination (Hypothetical versus Real-Life)

Because the present study used both hypothetical and real-life stories with each child, exploratory analysis was completed to preliminarily examine possible differences between children’s judgments by age and domain as a function of where the story originated (i.e., personally experienced by the child or hypothetical). The analysis of any differences based on story origination is to be considered completely exploratory as the current methods employed do not allow us to conclude what any differences between hypothetical and real-life would mean in psychologically meaningful terms. Any significant findings should merely be considered an indicator that future research should more fully explore potential story origination differences.

Of the total real-life stories collected, only 3 were coded as Personal and only 6 were coded to be Prudential. Consequently, comparisons were only made for the real-life Moral and real-life Social-Conventional stories versus the hypothetical in these two domains. There were a total of 24 real-life Moral stories and 42 real-life Social-Conventional. In order to be included in these hypothetical versus real-life story origination comparisons, a child had to have at least one story in each of these two domains. If a child had more than one story in one of these domains, their good/bad and fair/unfair ratings for that particular domain were averaged, thus leaving one real-life score in either the moral or Social-Conventional domain per child. A paired t-test was used to evaluate differences between real-life versus hypothetical Moral stories and real-life versus

hypothetical Social-Conventional stories. Results indicate that older children rated the transgressor in real-life Social-Conventional stories (*M* = 2.125, *SD* = .8013) worse than in hypothetical Social-Conventional stories (*M* = 3.58, *SD* = 1.311), *t*(11) = 5.282, *p* = .000. There was no significant difference for older children in ratings of good/bad for real-life Moral stories versus their ratings of hypothetical Moral stories. There was also no significant difference for older children's ratings of maternal fairness for either real-life/hypothetical domain comparison for older children. There were no significant differences for maternal fairness ratings for older children, however, that there appears to be a fairness-of-mother rating trend for older children when evaluating real-life versus hypothetical Moral stories, *t*(6) = -2.05, p = .086. It appears that older children may be judging mothers to be more fair in real-life Moral stories (M = 4.286, *SD* = .756) compared to hypothetical Moral stories (*M* = 3.29, *SD* =1.89). See Table 3.

Upon examining how younger children evaluate these real-life versus hypothetical differences in different domains, it is noted that the paired t-test reveals quite a number of significant findings. Younger children rated the story actor's behavior to be worse in the real-life stories than in the hypothetical stories *t*(10) = 3.507, *p* = .006. The mean judgments of the real-life Moral stories (*M* = 1.545, *SD* = .907) versus the hypothetical Moral stories (*M* = 3.27, *SD* = 1.849) were thus significantly different. Findings were also significant for the younger children's rating of maternal fairness for the real-life Moral story versus the hypothetical Moral story, *t*(10) = 2.928, p = .015. Interestingly, although they rate

the real-life moral behavior to be worse, they rated the mother in real-life stories (*M* = 2.697, *SD* = 1.481) to be significantly less fair than the mother in the hypothetical Moral story (*M* = 4.45, *SD* = 1.293)! See Table 3. Finally, paired t-tests were also used to test for differences in younger children’s evaluations of the real-life Social-Conventional versus hypothetical Social-Conventional stories. There were no significant differences for this evaluation, although this comparison approached significance, $t(11) = 2.064$, $p = .063$ with younger children evaluating real-life Social-Conventional transgressions (*M* = 2.5, *SD* = 1.481) to be worse than those in hypothetical stories (*M* = 4.45, *SD* = 1.293). There were also no significant finding in comparing young children’s evaluations of maternal fairness for real-life Social-Conventional versus hypothetical Social-Conventional stories. See Table 3.

Thus, overall, the results indicate older children rate real-life Social-Conventional transgressions more harshly than hypothetical ones in the Social-Conventional domain. Older children did not significantly differ in good/bad rating when comparing real-life versus hypothetical moral transgressions, nor do they significantly differ in any fairness ratings. In contrast, younger children, judged real-life moral transgressions more harshly than hypothetical transgressions in the Moral domain, and they also judged mothers in real-life Moral stories to be less fair than mothers in hypothetical Moral stories. In contrast, the younger children did not judge real-life Social-Conventional and hypothetical Social-Conventional stories differently, nor did they significantly vary in rating of fairness. Again, given the methodological design of the present study, the evaluations of

real-life versus hypothetical stories should be considered strictly exploratory. Further, since we can't determine what factors underlie the true differences as a function of story origination (real-life and hypothetical stories), we can only claim that these variations appear to exist, though for reasons yet to be determined and explored in future research.

Table 3

Paired Samples Test - Judgments of Real vs Hypothetical Stories By Age and Domain

				Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of Difference Lower	Upper			
Older	Good/ Bad	Moral	Hypothetical / Real	-0.1429	2.0354	0.7693	-2.0253	1.7396	-0.19	6	0.859
		Social-Conventional	Hypothetical / Real	1.4583	0.9564	0.2761	0.8506	2.0660	5.282	11	0.000
	Fair/ Unfair	Moral	Hypothetical / Real	-1.0000	1.2910	0.4880	-2.1940	0.1940	-2.05	6	0.086
		Social-Conventional	Hypothetical / Real	-0.4722	0.9714	0.2804	-1.0894	0.1450	-1.68	11	0.120
Younger	Good/ Bad	Moral	Hypothetical / Real	1.7273	1.6335	0.4925	0.6299	2.8246	3.507	10	0.006
		Social-Conventional	Hypothetical / Real	1.0000	1.6787	0.4846	-0.0666	2.0666	2.064	11	0.063
	Fair/ Unfair	Moral	Hypothetical / Real	1.7576	1.9908	0.6002	0.4202	3.0950	2.928	10	0.015
		Social-Conventional	Hypothetical / Real	0.4583	1.6849	0.4864	-0.6122	1.5289	0.942	11	0.366

Maternal Style Effects

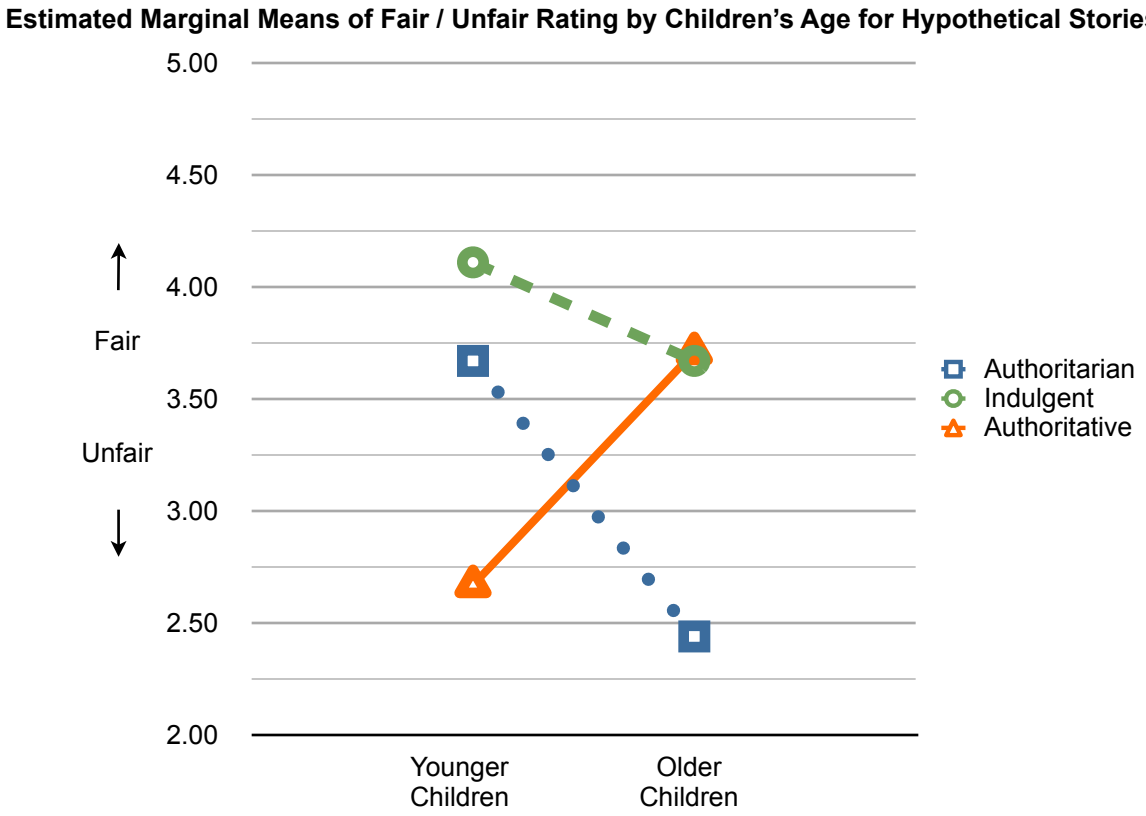
The present study also sought to explore the efficacy of coding maternal discipline style from self-reported descriptions of transgression interactions, and then examining whether children's judgments of good/bad and fair/unfair varied as a function of their mother's overall coded discipline style. Mothers' style was coded as either Authoritarian, Authoritative, or Indulgent. Of these styles, four

mothers were classified as Authoritarian, eight mothers were Indulgent, and thirteen mothers were Authoritative for a total of twenty-five mothers. The coders agreed on discipline style in 22 out of 25 cases, thus the percentage of agreement between coders was 88%. The Cohen’s Kappa coefficient to assess the reliability of these codings yielded Kappa = 0.875, with $p < .001$. The relatively few disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Univariate ANOVA was employed to determine if there were differences in judgments of fair and unfair across all story domains as a function of maternal discipline style and children’s age in hypothetical stories. Results indicate that the relationship between younger and older children and evaluations of fairness in hypothetical stories do indeed vary significantly at the $p<.05$ level as a function of discipline style [$F(2,19) = 4.862$, $p = .020$], Eta =.339. Post-Hoc analysis further revealed that the only significant differences in fairness evaluations as a function of age and discipline style existed when comparing Indulgent and Authoritative parenting. A Tukey post-hoc test was used to compare judgments of fairness within the discipline styles and revealed that the children of Indulgent mothers ($M = 4$, $SD = .563$) had significantly different judgments of fairness compared to the children of Authoritative mothers ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .907$). Figure 8 below illustrates the estimated marginal means for older and younger children as a function of maternal discipline style. The illustration suggests that while both older children of Authoritative and Indulgent coded mothers judged maternal fairness nearly identically, younger children who have mothers with these two coded discipline styles judge fairness in vastly different ways. Specifically, it

appears that younger children of coded Authoritative mothers tend to judge mothers to be largely unfair and younger children of coded Indulgent mothers judge mothers to be very fair. Although there may very well be age differences for coded Authoritarian parents, the N was too small to draw any even tentative conclusions.

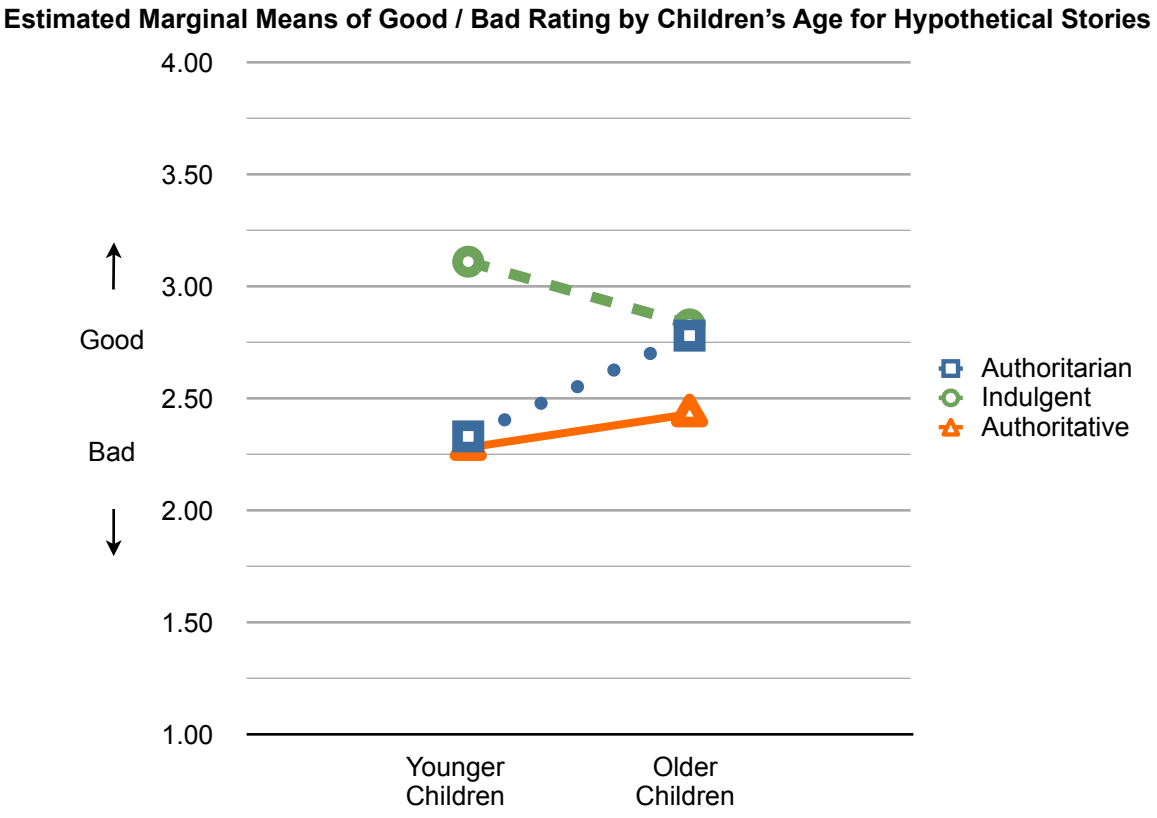
Figure 8



Univariate ANOVA was also employed to determine if there were differences in judgments of good and bad across all story domains as a function of coded maternal discipline style and children's age. Results indicate that the relationship between younger and older children and evaluations of good/bad do not significantly vary as a function of coded maternal discipline style. Figure 9

below illustrates the estimated marginal means for good/bad evaluations for older and younger children as a function of coded maternal discipline style. Although results were not significant, the illustration suggests that older children of parents coded Authoritative parents tend to judge a protagonist's behavior to be more bad than do older children of coded Indulgent mothers. The illustration further suggests that younger children of coded Indulgent mothers may follow this same pattern of evaluation by coded discipline style but to an even stronger extent. Again, although these findings are not statistically significant and the coding process has not yet been rigorously controlled, it seems worth considering that with a larger sample size this effect might be found.

Figure 9



Discussion

Based on the research literature and my past research, the present study tested whether: 1) older and younger children would evaluate maternal fairness differently depending on the nature of the transgression, 2) these judgments would be related to their own evaluations of the act/transgression as good or bad, and 3) the domain in which the transgression takes place would further impact children’s evaluations of good and bad, and fair and unfair differently at different ages. Overall, some of these propositions were confirmed, and some were quite different from the hypothesized expectations. Separately, and certainly as a secondary objective, this study explored methods, which should be considered preliminary, of coding maternal discipline style from self-reported descriptions of transgression interactions, and of using real-life and hypothetical stories during child interviews, and sought to ascertain the potential efficacy of later study into the differences using hypothetical versus real-life stories, and later study into the potential influence of domain-specific maternal discipline style on moral evaluations and judgments of maternal fairness.

Intention and Outcome

The present study sought, in part, to replicate the findings of the Johnston and Saltzstein (2010) study that evaluated children’s judgments of good/bad and fair/unfair as it related to varied intention, outcome, and maternal reaction hypothetical stories. Although these findings are also reported as domain differences, they can also be examined as a function of intentionality and a mismatch between intention and maternal reaction. In the Johnston and

Saltzstein (2010) study, older children judged mothers to be more fair when there is a match between intention and the mother’s reaction, as opposed to a match between mother’s reaction and outcome. For example, older children were found less likely to consider a mother fair if the fictitious child’s intention is bad, outcome is good and the mother praises the child! Younger children, however, not only tended to focus on outcome, but in particular, to ignore intention when judging fairness. Two of the hypothetical stories used in this study had stories where there was a mismatch between intention and maternal reaction. As mentioned, in the GI/BO/- story, the protagonist tries to make a sibling happy by taking the sibling on a slide the sibling loves. The sibling accidentally falls off the slide and is crying. The fictive mother runs to comfort the crying child and angrily orders the protagonist to go inside for a time-out. The results for this story showed that when it comes to judging this hypothetical mother’s fairness, younger children judged the mother to be significantly less fair than do older children. This finding different from Johnston and Saltzstein’s (2010) previous findings. In that study, older children judged the mother to more unfair than younger children, which is more consistent with Piaget’s earlier findings. This may be explained by the fact that a number of older children in the present research study seemed to infer negligence when evaluating both good/bad and maternal fairness in this bad outcome story. When deciding if the protagonists did something good or bad for this well-intentioned story, some older children who claimed the child was bad made comments such as “Well, she wanted to do something nice, but she should’ve thought about the safety.” Another older child

commented, “She was trying to help her, but she should’ve known she could fall.” These types of good/bad interpretations from older children then logically lead to this view of negligence coloring their interpretation of maternal fairness, as well. Some of the anecdotal comments from older children evaluating this story for maternal fairness included justifications such as, “Well, the Mom is fair because he could fall off the slide.” Such comments and the direction of the fairness evaluations for older children suggest that there may indeed be a confounding factor between negligence and outcome when older children are making evaluations as Nobe, et al. (2009) have suggested. This idea of culpability is complicated concept that Piaget (1932) suggested and indeed this is recognized in the law by such distinctions between concepts such as “involuntary manslaughter”, “reckless endangerment”, “first” and “second degree murder.”

In fact, about 66% of the older children judged the protagonist's behavior to be bad in this story despite the good intentions. It appears that the negative outcome of the sibling falling off the slide may be interpreted as a foreseeable negative consequence that was caused by negligence instead of an accidental outcome to a well-intended act. Nobes, et al. (2009) had indicated that older children will consider this negligence factor when making moral judgments and since that interpretation may color their judgment of the act being more bad than good, this would, in turn, affect their evaluation of maternal fairness in the current study. This appears to be the case when older children judge maternal fairness for this GI/BO/- story. Furthermore, for the GI/BO/- story, it appears that the older children’s fairness judgments are in line with their good/bad judgments.

Specifically, these judgments seem to mirror each other with those judging the act to be good as judging the mother to be unfair and those judging the act to be bad, as judging the mother to be fair. In conclusion, since older children often judged this well-intended protagonist to be bad, the judgment of the mother being fair for her negative reaction would actually be consistent with expectations for this age group. In contrast, it appears that younger children just view fairness as “Mom is fair if no one gets in trouble.”

Examining younger children’s judgments for this GI/BO/- story, we find they too did not completely follow the pattern for the previous research findings. Even though younger children *all* judged the behavior of the protagonist to be bad for this story, the majority of young children judged the mother to be unfair. This finding lends itself to the hypothesis that for younger children, when someone gets in trouble, the mother is unfair and when someone doesn’t get in trouble, the mother is fair. If you compare the evaluations of maternal fairness when the mother’s reaction is negative versus positive, this is the trend. In the GI/BO/- story, 77% of younger children say that the mother is unfair. In the BI/GO/+ story, nearly 85% evaluate the mother as fair. This pattern seems to support the notion that for young children, fairness is about not getting in trouble rather than any sort of *just* or *fair* response to the protagonist's action. Essentially, *as long as there is no negative consequence or punishment, then Mom is pretty fair*. If a mother’s reaction to a transgression is negative and there is punishment involved, then in the eyes of a young child, Mom is unfair. Thus, overall, it appears plausible that young children view maternal reaction as “fair” in

situations when no one gets in trouble, regardless of whether or not negative consequences would be appropriate. In a sense, then, fairness has not emerged as an independent basis for evaluation.

As mentioned in the results, there are also significant differences in evaluations of maternal fairness for the BI/GO/+ story, as well. In this story, the protagonist is angry with his friend and pushes him in the mud. The mother’s reaction is to praise the protagonist from saving the friend from running into the road. This reaction is a mismatch for the bad intended act. What we find is that young children focus on the mother’s positive reaction when judging fairness. In fact, only one younger child classified this mother’s positive reaction as unfair. The rest of the young children claimed Mom was fair. Of course, this answer may be a function of the focus on outcome or because young children think Mom is always fair when her reaction is praise and positive. Interestingly, while a slight majority of the older children (7 out of 12) did judge the mother to be unfair for this story as one would expect, there were still a few who (5) claimed she was fair. It’s plausible that those children may have viewed the benefit form being saved from potential danger as more “good” than the implication of the bad intention. Future studies should address this possibility directly when older children make such evaluations.

In addition to examining children’s evaluations of maternal fairness, children’s moral evaluations of good/bad in these intention-based stories was also of interest to the present study. Again, our previous research (Johnston & Saltzstein, 2010) found that, as expected by Piagetian theory, older children tend

to focus on the intentions of the protagonist when evaluating whether the behavior is good or bad. Younger children, however, were much more likely to focus on outcome and ignore intention. As mentioned in the discussion of maternal fairness evaluations above, the current study did not fully support these previous findings. The most consistent difference in results appears when we look at the good/bad evaluations of older children in the GI/BO/- story. When this story was previously used, the older children in that sample largely evaluated the protagonist’s behavior to be good, presumably due to the good intentions. In this study, however, the older children showed much more of a split. Two-thirds viewed this well-intended act as being bad, while the remainder viewed it to be good, as we would have expected. Again, many of the older children who deemed this protagonist “bad” did comment on their decision, as noted above, with comments such as “Well, she wanted to do something nice, but she should’ve thought about the safety.” It appears that some older children seemed to focus on the negligence factor or a foreseeable bad outcome rather than the good intention. Perhaps hearing their own real-life transgression stories impacted the depth of their evaluations, making them think about the outcome more critically than they would have had they only heard hypothetical stories. Given these discrepant findings, future studies should seek to explore why this split in moral evaluation occurs and to unravel if it is a function of perceived negligence that is guiding good/bad decision making rather than merely intention as Piagetian theory would predict for older children.

Upon looking at the younger children in the GI/BO/- hypothetical story we clearly see that *all* of the younger children view this protagonist as “bad”. This evaluation is completely expected given both the Piagetian perspective of young children focusing on outcome and ignoring intention, and also based on the Johnston and Saltzstein (2010) study which suggested that young children may also use the mother’s reaction as a moral guide in making their determination of good/bad behavior, as predicted by Piaget’s (1932) concept of *heteronomy*. In this story, the mother’s reaction is negative which may reinforce for a young child that this act was indeed, *very, very bad*. Johnston and Saltzstein (2010) had reported that when young children heard a variation of this same good intention, bad outcome story, but with a positive maternal reaction instead, they were less likely to judge the protagonist’s behavior as bad. Examining the effects of positive or negative maternal reaction on children’s evaluations of good/bad is also worth exploring in future research.

Continuing to look at the hypothetical, intention-based stories, we see that older and young children also appear to potentially evaluate good/bad differently in the BI/GO/+ story, although this finding was not statistically significant in the present study. Older children overwhelmingly evaluated this story protagonist to be bad, which is the expected evaluation for this age group. The younger children, however seem to be split. Half said the protagonist was good, and half said bad. It’s expected that those who say it was good may be focusing both on the positive outcome and also using the mother’s positive reaction as a moral guide, which itself is a positive outcome! Again, it may be that younger children

believe if there was no punishment involved, then the transgression wasn’t really that bad, plus they are focusing on the positive outcome as expected. However, the young children who claim this protagonist was bad is a difficult to explain according to Piagetian expectations. One possibility is that when hearing their own real-life stories, as well as these hypothetical stories, younger children may have been primed to consider that there was intentionality in their own transgressions and perhaps the fictional child did too. In thinking critically about stories they can relate to, this process may serve a cognitive exercise that forces children to consider intentionality when they otherwise might overlook it. Trying to tease out a deeper understanding of this issue should certainly be a focus of future studies. Overall, the present study gives us further evidence that children’s judgments of good versus bad and fair versus unfair have multiple contributors. Nonetheless, there clearly appears to be a developmental unfolding for understanding good and bad behavior and similarly, developing a sense of fairness may indeed be part of an overall unfolding of general moral development, as posited by Kohlberg.

Domain

The present study also investigated if children make differential evaluations of good/bad and fair/unfair as a function of the domain in which the story occurs. Ideally, it would have been desirable to compare all four domains of interest (Personal, Moral, Social-Conventional, and Prudential); however because exploratory analysis uncovered possible interesting differences between the impact of real-life and hypothetical stories that could vary by domain, a

decision was made to conduct the analysis of domain influence within real-life stories and hypothetical stories separately. Thus, the number of real-life Prudential stories and real-life Personal stories were too small to make such comparisons. Despite this, it was possible to get some valuable information regarding the real-life Moral and real-life Social-Conventional domain stories. Additionally, the hypothetical stories (GI/BO/- and BI/GO/+) were also coded for story domain. The good intention, bad outcome, negative maternal reaction story was re-coded as falling into the Prudential domain; the bad intention, good outcome, positive maternal reaction story was coded as being in the Moral domain because of the clearly stated bad intentions. Finally, the third hypothetical story about a child wanting to wear shorts and flip flops and the mother making them change was coded as being Social-Conventional. The analysis revealed that children’s rating of good and bad do indeed vary as a function of domain and age; however, this finding is only significant for the now-reconceptualized Prudential encounter. Older children evaluate the protagonist in this story to be significantly more “good” than do younger children. In contrast, all of the younger children in the present study claim the protagonist in the Prudential story did something bad. Of course, this story did have the good intention/bad outcome component which would predict younger children would ignore intention and focus on the bad outcome. This begs the question of whether or not this finding is about domain or intention. *It can be looked at either way*, and the results indicate that future research should investigate whether there is a domain effect here *regardless of intention*. Future studies might

consider including both a Prudential story that has intentionality components and a Prudential story in which no such intention/outcome factor exists. This approach could better tease out whether the differences found in the present study are strictly domain oriented or if intention and outcome are driving the results. Either finding no difference or a difference between “accidental” bad outcomes and other prudential transgressions would be interesting.

In looking at the hypothetical Moral and Social-Conventional domain stories we find that while there was not a statistically significant difference among children of different ages in their good/bad evaluations in these domains, though future studies should seek to evaluate with a larger sample. Finally, the results also indicate that younger and older children did not evaluate good/bad differently at all in the Social-Conventional domain. In fact, their mean good/bad evaluations are nearly identical. This may indicate that young children grasp an understanding of rule-based right and wrong earlier than they comprehend what makes something good or bad in other domains, which contrasts with the interpretation of Takagi and Saltzstein (2010) although in that study, there were few instances of social-conventional disputes. They found that young children who could explain why they would engage in non-prudential behaviors, such as running on a subway platform, could not explain why they would not engage in non-moral behavior, such as not throwing a toy at a playmate.

The current study had also hoped to investigate children's evaluations of maternal fairness within the hypothetical domain stories. Previous research suggests that children of various ages deem parents to have more or less

authority depending on domain. It has been shown that younger children are more likely to view parents as having authority in personal or Social-Conventional circumstances, while older children do not share that view (Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 2006(b); Turiel, 1998; Turiel, 2002). Again, unfortunately, given the small sample size, there was no way to fully analyze this aspect of the data.

Separately, when looking at domain differences within the real-life stories, it was found that younger and older children differ significantly in how they rate good/bad in real-life Moral and real-life Social-Conventional stories. Younger children judged the protagonist in real-life Moral stories to be worse than older children did. This may be because younger children have less experience with the maternal reactions in the Moral domain and potentially may judge a negative maternal reaction as an indicator that the transgression is very bad. In order to explore this possibility, future research should code maternal reactions for positive or negative consequences and examine whether the real-life good/bad ratings are related more to the type of maternal reaction to a transgression or to the domain involved. Presumably, mothers would react more negatively to moral transgressions and this type of negative reaction may be what drives young children to rate this behavior as bad. Previous research does support the idea that mothers are much firmer in their stance on moral events as opposed to other domains (Arsenio, 2002; Nucci & Weber, 1995). Older children, who have more experiences with both their mothers and transgressions in general, may more critically evaluate the circumstances surrounding their own transgressions and thus not place as much weight on maternal reaction to the transgression in

determining good/bad ratings. In other words, they have what are generally called, evaluative standards of their own. Furthermore, older children may vary in their interpretations of real-life transgressions in a way that is more cognitively advanced, and thus different, than their younger counterparts.

The results for the real-life Social-Conventional stories also indicate that there are significant differences in how older and younger children rate these stories for good and bad. The results show that older children rated their own Social-Conventional transgressions to be worse than did younger children. This finding may show that older children understand the purpose of such Social-Conventional rules. Although domain theory would suggest that older children are more likely to question Social-Conventional rules, the older children in this study are not yet adolescents where one would likely find more of a shift to a less critical good/bad rating. Again, it’s possible that young children have an evolving sense of what maternal rules are and thus they might find Social-Conventional transgressions to be less bad because the rules that surround them are more arbitrary than moral ones (e.g., “why eat with utensils instead of one’s fingers?”). Thus, younger children may view Social-Conventional rules as arbitrary, which in a sense they are, and therefore puzzling. Also, mothers of older children may react more harshly to Social-Conventional transgressions because they believe that older children should already “know the rules” or because they violate group rules and therefore elicit group condemnation. This may be why younger children view violation of Social-Conventional rules to be less bad than older

children. Smetana (1989) points out that as children get older, mothers expect children to abide by the rules.

Interestingly, there were no significant differences for how older and younger children evaluate maternal fairness for either the real-life Moral story or for the real-life Social-Conventional story. In fact, the results show that both age groups follow a similar pattern with both possibly judging the Moral stories ever so slightly worse than Social-Conventional stories for fairness. Overall, however, it is suggested that older children find mothers to be much more fair than do younger children, whatever the story domain may be. This suggests, perhaps not surprisingly, that older children view parents as fairer because they grasp the purpose and importance of moral and other rules, whereas younger children view them as arbitrary and bewildering. If this proves to be true generally, it would indeed be interesting and in a general sense, supportive of the view that moral and other social rules are bewildering to younger children, who therefore may fall back on a heteronomous or authority-based reason for conforming and complying.

Other comparisons were also made for the real-life Moral and real-life Social-Conventional stories. The present study sought to determine whether children, according to their age group, evaluated good/bad and fair/unfair differently for these real-life stories. Thus, comparisons were made to see in which real-life domains young children judged the protagonist more harshly and the mother more harshly and the same for older children. The only significant finding was for younger children on their good/bad ratings. It was found that

younger children find the protagonist in real-life Moral stories to have behaved worse than the protagonist in real-life Social-Conventional stories. Again, this finding could be a function of maternal reaction because presumably that reaction may be more severe or more negative in Moral stories, thus prompting a young child to judge the behavior to be worse. There were no differences for young children evaluating maternal fairness when comparing these two domains.

It should be added that these findings are different from those obtained by Takagi and Saltzstein (2008). However, they asked the young children (3-5 years old) a different question than I did, namely, whether the fictive child *would commit the act again and why.* This discrepancy in findings deserves further investigation and may provide a partial key to what occurs in early moral development.

Additional Considerations

As stated in the literature review, compared to the many studies that have children evaluate hypothetical moral vignettes, there are relatively much fewer studies that have children evaluate their own real-life transgression encounters (e.g., Nucci & Weber, 1995; Smetana, et al., 1993; Smetana, et al., 1999; Turiel, 2008) and fewer still that have been based on moral and other encounters as reported by parents that have included really young children (Takagi & Saltzstein, 2008). Most often in the literature we find that hypothetical vignettes are used to approximate a child’s level of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1963). And while it is not a conclusion of the present study, the exploratory analysis results suggest that children may reason differently about good/bad and fair/unfair as a function of story origination (real-life and hypothetical) or some other underlying story

differences. Due to the methods employed in the present study and the limited number of studies that have explored children’s evaluations of real-life moral judgments, it was difficult to conclude exactly what insights the present study provides. However, the results of the present study appear to suggest differences across ages for all children evaluating good/bad and maternal fairness in hypothetical versus real-life stories but *why* any differences exist remains unknown. Future studies should examine these differences more carefully with a broader array of stories across domains and fuller consideration of the underlying mechanisms that potentially make these real-life and hypothetical stories different for the children evaluating them.

The difference in evaluations of good/bad and maternal fairness in real-life transgressions also warrants further investigation. Kochanska, et al., (1996) suggested that children’s judgments of hypothetical vignettes are often used as a reflection of their own moral development, yet based on the present data, perhaps this is an inference that needs further exploration. Future research should further examine children’s moral judgments of real-life transgressions since there may be nuanced facets of these real-life encounters that cannot be captured in hypothetical stories. It would also be interesting to try to more fully understand children’s commentary on their own real-life transgressions. Although it was not statistically analyzed in this study, it appears that many of the older children seemed inclined to provide comments about why the child was good or bad in the real-life stories in particular. Many of these comments had a tone of “justification” to them. For example, children said things like, “Well, it was

bad I guess, but he did apologize” or “All she did was forget to move her stuff” and “Well, not extremely bad since she didn’t get anyone else in trouble.” It sounds as if even when older children view their own behavior as bad, many feel inclined and have the cognitive and linguistic resources to excuse it away to some extent. Overall, the understanding of these decisions is something that needs further review.

Another possible difference between hypothetical and real-life moral and other encounters is that the former are usually precoded, e.g., the actor’s intentions, the constraints upon the actions specified, whereas in real-life encounters, these construals or interpretations of the situation are not specified. In a sense, in real-life encounters, we all do what the jury in a trial is enjoined to do, ferret out the “facts” of the situation.

Despite the fact that it was not a factor of interest for the present study, it was an interesting phenomenon to note that *none* of the children in this study ever outwardly claimed or recognized that the real-life stories were their own. Many of the older children made comments such as, “Wow! I had something like that happen once” or “It’s like you read my mind!” Despite noting their familiarity with the story, they still did not recognize that the story was indeed their own. Perhaps this could be explained by a kind of egocentrism, i.e., that such transgressions happen to everyone and this thinking was across all age groups. One child, when noting with shock how her Mom reacts the same way as the Mom in the real-life stories even stated, “I think all the parents of the world went to a meeting of what to say to your daughter.” Certainly some of the stories were

of a common vein that children could imagine them happening to other children quite easily, but even when there were stories that were extremely specific, none of the children questioned where the story originated beyond merely acknowledging how familiar it felt. They all seemed to think that their stories happen to all kids just like the hypothetical stories might.

The present study also sought to explore a new method, which should be considered preliminary, to evaluate the impact of a mother’s discipline style on her child’s judgments of good/bad and fair/unfair by coding her overall style from a set of self-reported descriptions of daily transgression interactions submitted over a number of weeks. Due to the population fragmentation caused by this study’s conservative decision to analyze the real-life and hypothetical stories separately, we were only able to evaluate the impact of discipline style on evaluations of hypothetical stories. More research is needed to even offer preliminary analysis of how coded maternal discipline style might impact judgments of real-life transgressions. It probably is also be advisable to employ an independent and more granular measure of discipline style rather than inferring an overall style from a set of self-reported discipline encounters.

Despite the need for a more fully developed examination of maternal discipline approach, analysis of the hypothetical stories and the impact of maternal discipline style did still yield some interesting preliminary and suggestive findings. The results revealed that older and younger children judged maternal fairness differently as a function of overall discipline style. This may indicate that a child’s own experience of maternal style has an impact on their

view of what makes a mother fair, but that the effect may vary with age, standing in for development. What the data specifically suggest is that younger children of indulgent versus coded Authoritative mothers judge maternal fairness very differently. The results show that young children of coded Authoritative mothers view mother to be largely unfair while young children of Indulgent mothers view mother to be significantly fairer. This may be because young children believe that mom is “fair” if no one gets in trouble. Following that logic, children of coded Indulgent mothers may be more prone to viewing Mom as fair since they are used to getting their way. The data also indicate that as children get older, the children of those mothers coded Authoritative view their mothers as being more fair, and the children of coded Indulgent mothers view them as significantly less fair than younger children of coded Indulgent mothers. What is also interesting in the results indicate that for older children, coded maternal discipline style may not matter in judgments of fairness. The older and younger children of both authoritative and indulgent parents seem to judge maternal fairness nearly identically.

For purposes of completeness, it is worth noting that the present study did not have a large sample of coded Authoritarian mothers, not surprising given the highly educated sample of mothers. Based on the small group we did gather, however, it appears this could be a worthy area of further exploration. It is certainly plausible that children of Authoritarian parents judge maternal fairness in a way that is very different from children of Indulgent and Authoritative parents. So while we see that in older children, kids of both coded Indulgent and coded

Authoritative moms judge the mother to be about the same level of fair, children of coded Authoritarian mothers in this age group judge the mothers to be drastically more unfair. This would make sense since there is very little verbal give-and-take and explanation in this form of parenting, thus potentially leading children to feel rules and sanctions are more arbitrary and thus, unfair. Clearly, more research is needed with a larger and more diverse sample size in order to fully explore if there are differences in fairness evaluations across all three discipline styles, possibly coded by domain or even as a function of the resolution strategy employed during a given transgression encounter.

Although decades of research supports the notion that with a child’s developing cognitive abilities and experience, there is a shift in moral understanding, we must acknowledge that even when older children are capable of reasoning good from bad or right from wrong, they do not always abide by a such a moral compass in real-life. Arsenio (2002) points out that knowing what is good does not always translate into doing what is good, and he asks, “what is the motivational force that leads us to do the good in these situations?” (p. 105). Examining real-life moral dilemmas brings us a little closer to understanding what drives real-life moral behavior. As humans we can look at others’ misdeeds and clearly point out their transgressions and what they should have done instead. But as humans, it is often more difficult to fully comprehend our own transgressions and judge our own misdeeds. We feel compelled to justify our own behaviors when the story is our own. Our justifications add a layer of complexity to morally evaluating real-life transgressions instead of the more often

used hypothetical ones. But because real-life stories are presumably closer to the life and examples of the participants, we must further question what are the factors that influence our interpretations and evaluation of problematic situations? Specifically, what are the factors, such as parenting strategies, and how does that impact a child’s view of their own moral behavior and way of interpreting right from wrong? And how do those views and interpretations shift as a function of domains? What are the circumstances where children learn to excuse and justify their own misdeeds or learn from them and judge themselves more critically? I believe the present study hopefully serves as a pilot that points to the need for further investigation in that it illustrates how research must search to more fully understand the role of domains, maternal discipline strategy, age and intentionality in children’s determinations of what is good and bad and fair and unfair in actual, real-life transgressions, and possibly in comparison to evaluations of hypothetical transgression encounters. I believe that using a diary method, such as the method used here and by Takagi and Saltzstein (2010), offers a new and promising way of doing so. It promises to help maximize the actual experience of that child in that family while providing opportunities for examining the child’s thinking and evaluations of an array of morally- and other socially-relevant encounters.

APPENDIX A

Daily Discipline Journal

Please fill in the information below to the best of your recollection. Give as many details as possible about the situation, how it began, what was said and done, your child's actions and reactions, and how things were resolved. If you have more than one encounter to report for the day, please feel free to write about other incidents on a separate paper or include it at the end of today's journal log. If you are journaling regarding more than one child, please fill out separate logs for each child. If your encounter involves more than one child, be sure to identify each child's participation in the incident. If you have any questions about how to complete this journal, please contact Marla Johnston at mother.child.journal@gmail.com or 631-721-7097. Thank you.

Date:

Mother's First Name:

First Name(s) of Child/Children Involved:

Child/Children's Date(s) of Birth:

Please describe what happened in detail. For example, if the child threw a ball and hit his/her sibling - was it done on purpose, while playing, were they told not to do so, etc. What was the child's intention?

What was the outcome?

What was your reaction to the situation? Please be as detailed as possible.

What was your child's reaction to the situation? What did you say to your child? What did you believe was going on in your child's mind at the time? What were the reasons for your reaction? Please be as detailed as possible.

What was your child's reaction to the situation? How did your child react to you? What did they say or do?

What do you believe was going on in your child's mind during this incident? If relevant to the situation, what do you think your child's intentions were?

How were things resolved? What, if any, were the consequences, or punishments? Please be as specific as possible?

The researcher plans to take a few of your encounters and rewrite them like a story to be read to your child. Names, characters and details will be changed to

make it seem like it happened to someone else. Is the above encounter too upsetting for your child to discuss in the future? Please circle: YES/NO

In addition to the incident above, we are also interested in understanding children's conceptions of right and wrong. Can you remember an incident involving your child where they did something to someone else/something else with bad intentions that caused harm> If so, what were the consequences and outcome? Alternatively, can you recall any incident when your child did something that resulted in a bad outcome (but not necessarily with bad intentions) that you felt they should have foreseen the potential of a bad outcome? Please describe any of these incidents to the best of your recollection.

APPENDIX B

Jane was playing outside with her friend, Liz. Jane was really angry at Liz because they could never agree on what games to play. Suddenly, Jane noticed a GIANT mud puddle near the street. Liz was standing near the mud puddle and Jane ran to push her into it!

Whoosh! Liz went flying into the mud! Liz was covered in icky, goopy mud form head to toe! Jane was glad she pushed her and wasn’t even upset that Liz was crying.

Jane’s Mommy came running over. “Jane!” she shouted, “Thank goodness you stopped Liz from running into the road!” She helped Liz get up and took her inside to clean up. She gave Jane a giant hug for stopping Liz from running into the road.

APPENDIX C

Susie’s little sister, Mia, loved to go on the big slide. Mia was too little for the big slide and Susie knew she wasn’t supposed to go on it. Mia and Susie went outside and Mia pointed at the slide and shouted, “Slide! Slide!”

Wanting to make Mia happy, Susie picked her up and took her to the top of the very, very tall slide. Mia was THRILLED! Just as Mia was about to slide down, she stumbled and fell off the side of the slide! “Oh, no!” shouted Susie as she went to help her sister.

Susie and Mia’s Mommy came outside. She was very upset. “Mia!” she shouted as she ran to pick up the crying little girl. “Susie!” she shouted in anger, “You know Mia shouldn’t go on the slide! I trusted you to watch her!” “But I was just trying to make her happy!” cried Susie.

Susie’s Mom was NOT happy. As she helped Mia, she ordered Susie to go inside for a time out. Susie was very upset that Mia fell and that her Mommy was angry. She went inside for her time out.

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