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Young children understand and defend the entitlements of others



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ABSTRACT

Human social life is structured by social norms creating both obligations and entitlements. Recent research has found that young children enforce simple obligations against norm violators by protesting. It is not known, however, whether they understand entitlements in the sense that they will actively object to a second party attempting to interfere in something that a third party is entitled to do—what we call counter-protest. In two studies, we found that 3-year-old children understand when a person is entitled to do something, and so they actively defend this person's entitlement against unjustified interference from second parties. In some cases, they even enforce second-order entitlements, for example, in the case of ownership where an owner is entitled to entitle others to use the owner's property.

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Introduction

Social norms are the “glue” of human societies (Chudek & Henrich, 2011; Elster, 1989; Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Tomasello, 2009). These norms create not only *obligations* (participants of a social practice are expected to act in certain ways in certain circumstances) but also *entitlements* (participants of a social practice are empowered by the group to act in certain ways in certain circumstances). Typically, when someone has an entitlement to perform a certain act, others are obligated not to interfere (Hohfeld, 1913, 1917; Rainbolt, 1993; Searle, 2010).

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Recent developmental research has found that a basic understanding of social norms—in particular of simple obligations to act in certain ways in rule-governed social practices—develops very early in human ontogeny. Young children (from 2 or 3 years of age) not only follow social norms in their own actions but also enforce these same norms on others by spontaneously and normatively sanctioning mistakes through third-party protest, critique, and teaching in response to norm transgressions (Rakoczy, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2008; see Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013, and Schmidt & Tomasello, 2012, for reviews). Moreover, they do this in a variety of contexts such as conventional games (e.g., Rakoczy et al., 2008; Schmidt, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2011), pretense (Rakoczy, 2008; Wyman, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2009), artifact use (Casler, Terziyan, & Greene, 2009), over-imitation (Kenward, 2012; Keupp, Behne, & Rakoczy, 2013), language (Rakoczy & Tomasello, 2009), and moral norms pertaining to harm or property (Rossano, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2011; Schmidt, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2012; Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011).

The mature normative structure characteristic of adult societies, however, clearly goes beyond obligations to follow simple rules of social practices. Mature normativity involves not only obligations but also entitlements, with entitlements and obligations being related to one another in systematic ways. Most fundamentally, there are interpersonal horizontal normative relations (*horizontal normativity*); entitlements by one agent are typically related to obligations by another agent and vice versa. Thus, a right-holder being entitled to perform a certain act correlates with a second party being obligated not to interfere with the right-holder's performing the act (Hohfeld, 1913, 1917; Rainbolt, 2006; Searle, 2010). For instance, the owner of a book may use the book, and others are obligated not to interfere. In addition, there may be second-order entitlements (*vertical normativity*) in the form of entitlements to entitle others to act in certain ways. In the case of ownership, an owner of Object O is entitled not only to treat O in certain ways (first-order) but also to entitle others (second-order) to treat O in certain ways (Hart, 1961; Hohfeld, 1913, 1917; Honoré, 1961). For example, the owner of a car has the (second-order) right to entitle a person to use the car (first-order) temporarily, and others are obligated not to interfere with that person's (first-order) entitlement to use the owner's car temporarily. Or, parents (in contrast to other adults) are institutionally entitled to entitle their children to engage in some activities, and government agencies are institutionally entitled to entitle citizens to engage in other activities (e.g., by issuing a visa to work abroad).

Among the domains involving horizontal and vertical normative relations, ownership might be something like a “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978) for young children's learning about entitlements. For example, Kalish and Anderson (2011) argued that “ownership may be one of the critical entry points” (p. 65) for children's developing understanding of normative status as created and acknowledged by the group. Even before young children reason about ownership, they engage in disputes over possessions (Hay & Ross, 1982; Ross, 1996; see Ross, Concant, & Vickar, 2011, for a review), which are most likely based on egocentric concerns such as desires (Kalish, 2005). Between 2 and 3 years of age young children develop a basic concept of ownership (Friedman & Neary, 2008; Neary, Van de Vondervoort, & Friedman, 2012), and between 3 and 4 years of age children's notion of ownership becomes more broad and adult-like. They understand that owners control the use of an object and that ownership can be transferred by certain means such as gift giving and selling (Blake & Harris, 2009; Kim & Kalish, 2009; Neary, Friedman, & Burnstein, 2009; see Friedman, Neary, Defeyter, & Malcolm, 2011, for a review).

From around 3 years of age, young children understand something about the normative aspects of *obligations* in the context of ownership. For instance, they enforce non-owners' obligation not to throw away others' property (Rossano et al., 2011). But it is not known whether young children understand and enforce *entitlements*, that is, whether they understand that (i) horizontally, entitlements correlate with obligations by others, or that (ii) vertically, there are normative relations between higher and lower order entitlements such as the second-order entitlement of an owner to entitle non-owners (first-order) to use the owner's property. Understanding entitlement as a normative status is critical for developing a notion of entitlement as “immunizing” individuals from invalid objections or punishment because this immunity has been granted by some people or institutions recognized as having this power by the community at large (Feinberg, 1980).

In the current studies, therefore, we investigated whether young children (3-year-olds) understand entitlements proper, that is, as structured by both horizontal and vertical normativity. We tested this

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