# Moral Obligation and Evaluating Group Disloyalty Among Children

Valentin Gulyas, Lily Samiee, Jacquelyn Glidden, Angelica Bueno, & Aline Hitti Ph.D.

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
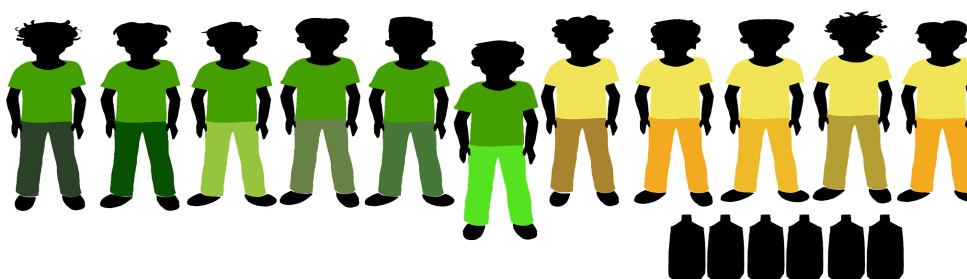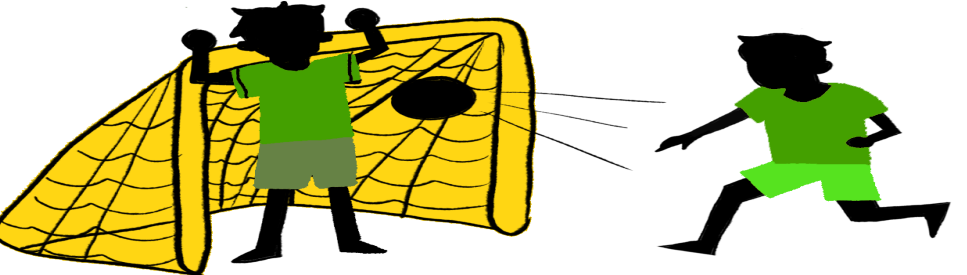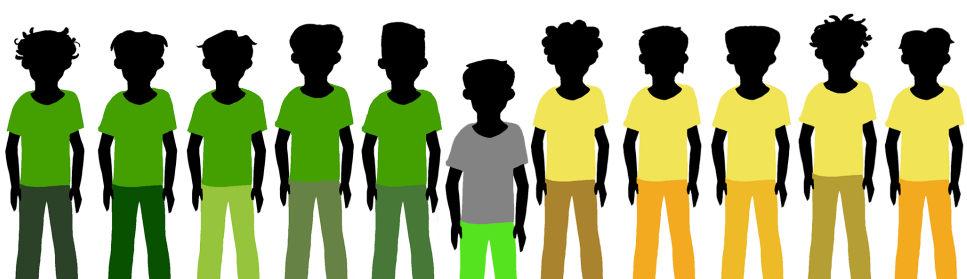CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

## Introduction

Research on moral obligations in childhood has shown that children ages 8 to 13 years believe it is a moral obligation to help the out-group in high need conditions (Sierksma, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2014). Children feel a moral requirement to offer help in high need situations, independent of group membership. What is less documented is children's sense of moral obligation to the out-group in contexts of varying need and disloyalty (Nesdale, Maass, Durken, & Griffiths, 2005). This study adds to the understanding of various intergroup contexts in which children weigh moral obligation of being loyal to ones group.

## Participants

- 37 children
- $M_{age}$=13.27 years; SD=2.22
- 68% female

## Methods & Measures

- Participants were surveyed and randomly assigned to one of three conditions (e.g., physical harm, psychological harm, and social conventional harm).
- Each condition included two levels of disloyalty (e.g., low level of disloyalty and high level of disloyalty).
- Participants responded to two questions about the importance of helping their in-group/out-group ("How important is it that X try to get more water for your/the other group?") using a Likert-type scale (1 = really not important, 6 = really important.

## Survey Conditions

| | Story A: Low Disloyalty | Story B: High Disloyalty |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Physical Harm Condition | X gives 2 bottles to the other group and 4 bottles to your group. Question: How important is it that X try to get more water for your/the other group? | X gives 6 bottles to the other group and 0 bottles to your group. Questions: How important is it that X try to get more water for your/the other group? |
| 2. Psychological Harm Condition | X intentionally passes the soccer ball to the other team. Question: How important is it that X try to win the game for your/the other team? | X intentionally scores a goal for the other team. Question: How important is it that X try to win the game for your/the other team? |
| 3. Social Conventional Harm | X is not supporting your group by not wearing your teams shirt (grey). Question: How important is it that X try to support your/the other group | X is not supporting your group by wearing the other teams shirt color (yellow or green). Question: How important is it that X try to support your/the other group? |

## Results

1. Participants evaluated helping the in-group as more important than helping out-group in both the low level ($F_{(1, 34)}$=13.47 $p$<.05 $\eta^2$=.28) and high level ($F_{(1, 34)}$=63.41 $p$< .001 $\eta^2$=.65) disloyalty stories.
2. An Evaluation X Harm type Interaction effect ($F_{(1, 34)}$=16.96 $p$<.01 $\eta^2$=.33) indicates that participants evaluated helping the in-group as more important than helping the out-group primarily in the psychological harm ($p$<.01) and physical harm ($p$<.01) conditions but less so in the social conventional condition ($p$<.05). See Figure 1.

## Discussion

Findings show that overall participants thought it was more important to help the in-group than the out-group, irrespective of the level of disloyalty. The results suggest that participants in the high level of disloyalty story found it most important to help the in-group than the out-group in the physical harm condition. These findings add to the growing literature on intergroup attitudes in childhood and how children develop an understanding of morality in group contexts.



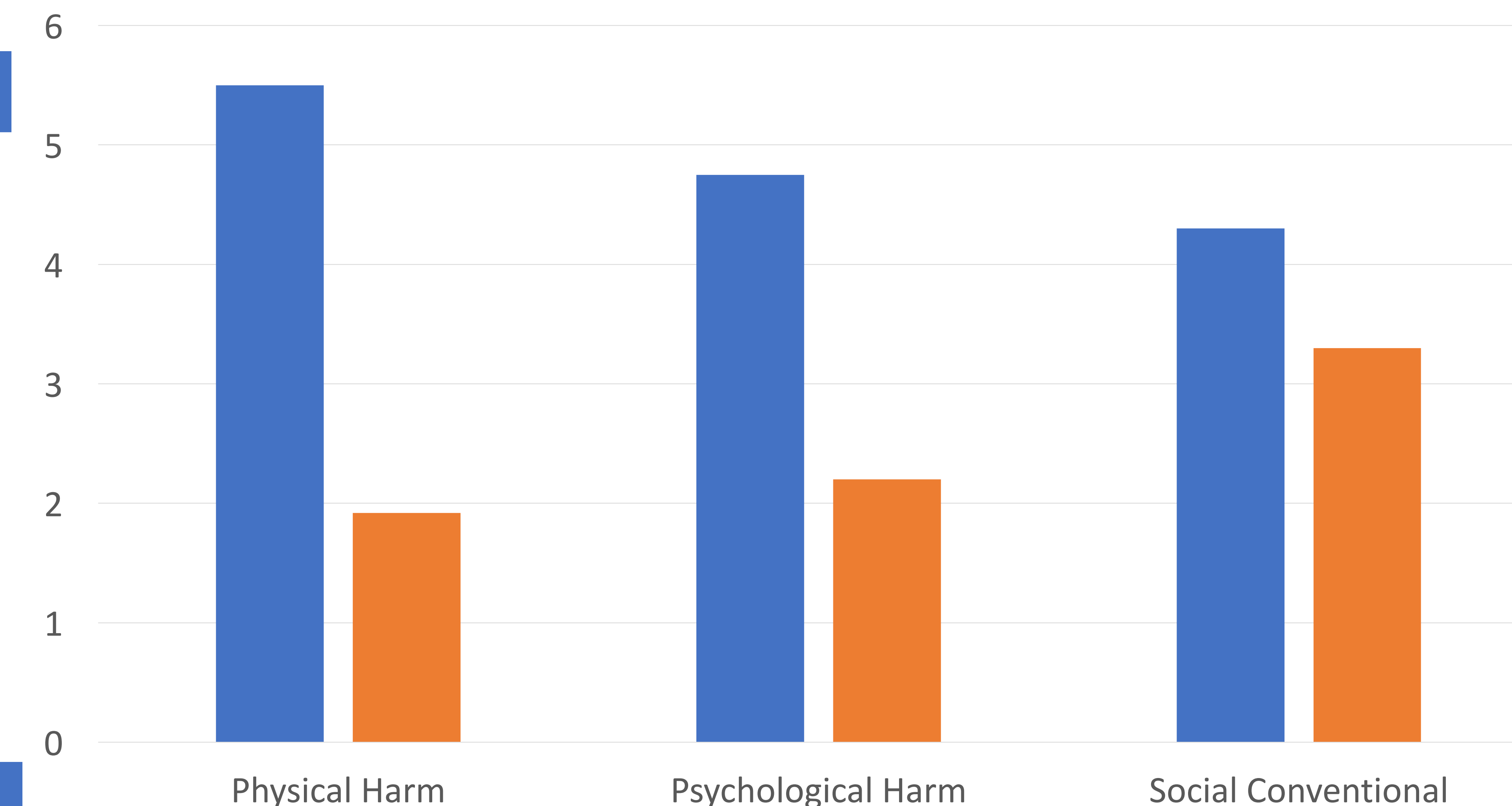■ Importance of helping in-group   ■ Importance of helping out-group

Figure 1. Evaluating the importance of helping the in-group and out-group for the three conditions on a 6-point Likert-type scale.

## References

Nesdale, D., Maass, A., Durkin, K., & Griffiths, J. 2005. Group norms, threat, and children's racial prejudice. *Child Development* 76(3) 652-663.

Sierksma, J., Thijs, J., & Verkuyten, M. 2014. Children's intergroup helping: the role of empathy and peer group norms. *Journal of Experimental Child Pychology* 126 369-383.