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## Mothers' and Teachers' Home and School Rules: Young Children's Conceptions of Authority in Context

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Samples of 95 preschoolers, first graders, and third graders responded to questions whereby one authority (mother or teacher) permitted an act (moral or conventional) to occur across contexts (home and school) and the other authority prohibited the act from occurring across contexts. Participants (a) were asked which authority the child should acquiesce to and whether an authority has the right to permit and prohibit the acts across contexts and (b) ranked and rated the seriousness of the acts. The results revealed that children's evaluations were a function of three interrelated factors: the authorities' status, the context, and the domain of the act. Age differences in children's judgments and justifications are discussed.

One of the primary social systems during childhood is the relationship between an adult and a child (Hartup, 1989). If this relationship is hierarchical in that the adult has power over the child, then the adult is considered to be in a position of authority. Because of the significant nature of the relationship between a child and an adult authority, there has been an growing interest in assessing young children's concepts of authority (Braine, Pomerantz, Lorber, & Krantz, 1991; Laupa & Turiel, 1986; Tisak, 1986). Although Piaget (1932/1965) reported that young children consider a command by an authority to be sacred and unalterable, contemporary evidence demonstrates that young children do not have an unitary construct of authority.

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The domain and type of directive are important factors influencing young children's thinking about authority (e.g., the moral and the conventional domains). As defined by Turiel (1983, 1998), the moral domain includes prescriptive judgments regarding how individuals ought to behave toward one another. In contrast, conceptions of conventions pertain to arbitrary rules in which the purpose is to promote behavioral uniformities that coordinate the interactions of individuals. Past findings (see Helwig, Tisak, & Turiel, 1990; Tisak, 1995, for a review) reveal that when children are asked to evaluate whether an authority has a right to articulate a directive, they consider whether the directive concerns matters of justice or whether the directive concerns an arbitrary behavior. With regard to the type of directive, young children consider it legitimate for authorities to establish both moral and conventional rules and find it acceptable for authorities to abolish conventional rules. However, young children do not grant authorities the right to negate a moral rule nor to permit a moral transgression to occur (Damon, 1980; Laupa & Turiel, 1986; Tisak, 1993).

Another factor influencing children's authority concepts is the status of the authority figure. Laupa and Turiel (1993) reported that although children did not believe that the jurisdiction of an authority extends to other contexts, they did believe that social position transcends contextual boundaries. That is, the authors stated that children (kindergartners through sixth grade) rejected a principal's authority to formulate a rule outside the context of the school (e.g., to make a rule to stop fighting in the park). However, the youngest children (kindergartners and first graders) did consider it legitimate for a principal to prohibit fighting outside the school context (e.g., to tell the children to stop fighting in the park).

Children with increasing age have a greater understanding of the roles and the expertise of various authorities (Braine et al., 1991; Cullen, 1987). As an example, Cullen (1987) assessed children's (ages 5, 8, and 11 years) understanding of authority situations based on power (e.g., political: mayor; positional: teacher; familial: parents; and peer: school patrol girl) and authority situations based on expertise (e.g., political: prime minister; positional: coach; familiar: parents; and peer: older children). Cullen reported that although the older children had a greater understanding of the authority situations than did the 5-year-olds, the youngest children were able to correctly choose the positional and peer power-based authority figures.

Given this latter finding, it is especially important when assessing children's authority concepts to consider that children's day-to-day experiences with particular authority figures are more salient than their

experiences with other authorities. Thus, the current research was designed to further investigate young children's conceptions of authority by focusing on mothers and teachers as the authority figures. Young children's awareness regarding the role of mothers and teachers as authority figures is more advanced than their understanding of the role of other authorities, such as the police (Braine et al., 1991; Cullen, 1987). This issue may be especially important when investigating children's thinking about particular authority issues, such as whether the individual can generate or negate a rule. Furthermore, young children's day-to-day interactions with their mothers and their teachers as authority figures are more frequent, direct, and concrete, as compared with their experiences with other authority figures (e.g., police or even a principal). Hence, young children would be expected to have a greater understanding of the ascribed characteristics attributed to mothers and to teachers in positions of authority (Cullen, 1987; Dunbar & Taylor, 1982).

Additionally, given that mothers and teachers represent significant authority figures in two different but salient contexts in the child's life, the home and the school, respectively, an important question is whether their jurisdiction transcends settings (i.e., mothers in the school and teachers in the child's home). There are important ramifications if children do believe that mothers and teachers have the right to ascribe and/or negate rules across settings. For example, this may suggest that the rules and values parents instill in their children generalize across settings, as well as those of other influential authority figures, such as teachers. A problem could transpire when the authorities disagree as to the values and rules children should internalize.

In summary, in assessing whether mothers' and teachers' jurisdiction transcends settings, we examined whether children's thinking about the legitimacy of authority is influenced by the position or status of an authority (mothers vs. teachers), the context from which the rules were drawn (home or school), and the domain of the directive (moral and conventional). As reported in previous research (Laupa & Turiel, 1993; Nucci & Weber, 1995; Tisak, 1986), it was expected that young children's responses are influenced by the domain of the act. Specifically, it was predicted that children state that peers should comply with an authority prohibiting the moral transgression regardless of whether it occurred at home or in school, and regardless of whether it was the mother or the teacher who prohibited the act. However, it was expected that children state that mothers and teachers have the right to make rules prohibiting moral and conventional behaviors only within their own contexts. Furthermore, in accordance with past research (Damon, 1980; Laupa & Turiel, 1993; Tisak, 1993; Tisak & Turiel, 1988) it was expected that chil-

dren do not consider it legitimate for either authority to permit moral transgressions to occur, regardless of the context.

The participants were preschoolers, first graders, and third graders, in order to assess age differences. Specifically, although the youngest age group have had some experience in the preschool setting with teachers in their role of authority, they nonetheless would be considered novices, as compared with grade school children (Cullen, 1987). Therefore, it was predicted that preschool children, in comparison to the first and third graders, are more influenced by the mothers' commands than those of the teachers. Other researchers (Cullen, 1987; Dunbar & Taylor, 1982) reported that children with increasing age have a greater understanding of the formal and informal roles of a teacher. For example, Dunbar and Taylor (1982) reported that although children in first, third, and sixth grades found teachers' formal authority to be acceptable, as children advanced through the elementary grades, they were less accepting of teachers' informal authority. Consequently, it was predicted that by third grade, children are less accepting of teachers' rules outside the school context.

The first and third graders were asked to provide a rationale justifying their judgments to the authority questions. In past research (see Turiel, 1998, for a review) the justifications for moral evaluations have focused on individuals' rights and welfare, as well as concerns about fairness, justice, and equity. Rationalizations supporting conventional evaluations, however, pertained to sanctions, custom, order, and authority. It was expected that children's evaluations of the moral rules and transgressions primarily focus on the welfare of the individual, whereas conventional evaluations focus on authority and appropriateness of the act. At the same time, however, because of the greater experiences of the older children with authority across contexts, authority reasoning is utilized by the third graders, in contrast to their younger peers (Cullen, 1987). Furthermore, as reported in previous research (Braine et al., 1991), it was expected that children with increasing age provide a variety of justifications.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The sample was 95 children (51 females and 44 males): 30 preschool children ( $M = 56.2$  months,  $SD = 7.23$ , age range = 36 to 71 months), 32 first graders ( $M = 83.6$  months,  $SD = 4.72$ , age range = 74 to 96 months), and 33 third graders ( $M = 107$  months,  $SD = 5.21$ , age range = 99 to 121 months). The children were White and from working- and middle-class backgrounds. The participants were treated in accordance with the APA

ethical standards. Parental consent was obtained for all children, as well as their own consent to participate. Participation rate was 75%.

### *Procedure and Measures*

Children were individually administered a structured interview comprised of stories and pictures concerning home and school rules. The rules, which were derived from past research (Turiel, 1983), were classified as moral (a rule prohibiting hitting) and conventional (a rule prohibiting drinking juice out of a bowl). In each of the stories one authority, either the mother or the teacher, permits the act to occur across contexts (home and school) and the other authority forbids the act to occur across contexts (home and school). Children responded to questions pertaining to (a) which authority the child should acquiesce to, (b) the rights of an authority to permit the acts to occur across contexts, (c) the rights of an authority to prohibit the acts from occurring across contexts, and (d) evaluations of the seriousness of the acts when permitted by an authority. Justifications were assessed by asking the participants to provide a reason to support their evaluation to each of the questions, except for the ratings of seriousness of act. Participants received versions of the interview in which the gender of the child story characters matched the gender of the participant.

Two procedures were implemented to prevent children's fatigue. First, children were randomly assigned to one of two context conditions, home or school, whereby a child character was thinking about committing one of the acts (either at home or at school). Second, the interview took place in two separate 15-min sessions in which the children heard two different stories. In one story, the mother permits hitting (the teacher prohibits hitting) and the teacher permits drinking juice from a bowl (the mother prohibits drinking juice from a bowl). In the second story, the teacher permits hitting (the mother prohibits hitting) and the mother permits drinking juice from a bowl (the teacher prohibits drinking juice from a bowl). A random procedure was utilized to determine which one of the stories was presented first.

### *Assessment and Coding of Compliance, Legitimacy, and Seriousness*

The interview questions were asked in the context of a set of stories involving mothers' and teachers' home and school rules. The questions (listed later in the order presented) were presented to the participants at various points in the story line. To illustrate how each question was assessed we will describe the story (within the home context condition) in which the mother permits hitting and the teacher prohibits it. "Let's say that this child's mother said that he/she is allowed to hit other children no

matter where he/she is at. However, the child's teacher said that he/she is not allowed to hit other children no matter where he/she is at."

1. *Forced-choice compliance to an authority's directive.* Children were asked to make a paired-comparison between two authorities' directives (i.e., an authority permitting the transgression and an authority prohibiting the act) in order to choose which directive to obey. "One day when a child was at home he/she was thinking about hitting another child who was visiting. Who should the boy/girl listen to, his/her mother who says that he/she is allowed to hit another child or his/her teacher who says that he/she is not allowed to hit another child?"
2. *Legitimacy of rule-making by authority.* Children were asked to indicate whether an authority (i.e., mother, teacher) has a right (1 = okay, 2 = not okay) to make a rule prohibiting a specific behavior across contexts. "Is it okay or not okay for the teacher to make a rule that children are not allowed to hit each other when they are at home?"
3. *Legitimacy of authority to permit the act.* Children were asked to indicate whether it is legitimate (1 = okay, 2 = not okay) for an authority (i.e., mother, teacher) to permit a transgression to occur across contexts. "When the child is at home, is it okay for the mother to allow the boy/girl to hit another child?"
4. *Rating of seriousness.* Two questions were posed to assess children's evaluations of the seriousness of the rule violation. First, children were asked whether it was wrong for the child to commit the act when it was prohibited by one authority and permitted by the other (0 = wrong, 1 = not wrong). "Let's say this child was at home and he/she hits another child. Was it okay or not okay for the boy/girl to hit another child?"

Second, those children who indicated that the act was wrong were asked to rate how wrong it was for the child to commit the act. Participants were asked to point to line drawings depicting the degree of wrongness (2 = a little wrong, 3 = medium wrong, and 4 = very wrong). Thus, the rating scale ranged from 1 = not wrong to 4 = very wrong.

5. *Ranking of seriousness.* Children were asked to compare two children who violated the rules and to indicate which child was more wrong. The violated rules varied in terms of the domain of rule (moral and conventional) and the authority who made the rule (i.e., mother's rule or teacher's rule). "This boy/girl hit another child even though the teacher said that children must not hit. This boy/girl drank juice out of a bowl even though his/her

mother told him/her not to drink juice out of a bowl. Which boy/girl do you think is more naughty or bad, the one who broke the teacher's rule by hitting another child, or the one who broke the mother's rule by drinking juice out of a bowl?"

### *Assessment and Coding of Justifications*

The first and third graders were asked to provide a justification for each of the questions (except for the rating of seriousness of the act). Because past research (see Helwig et al., 1990; Tisak, 1995, for a review) has shown that it is difficult to obtain justifications from preschool children, justification data were not gathered for these participants. Each of the justifications was coded according to the scheme developed by Turiel (1983) and from the current data set. The justification categories included *others' welfare*, which pertains to the rights and welfare of persons other than the actor (e.g., "he would get hurt"); *authority status*, which pertains to the status of the individual providing the directive regarding the rule (e.g., "she is the mom and she can say that"); and *social appropriateness*, which refers to the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the behavior (e.g., "that is something you put soup into, not juice").

A binary classification procedure was implemented to assign scores to participants for each of the justification categories. This procedure was implemented separately for each domain of act (moral and conventional) and for each authority (mothers and teachers). Thus, for each question, an affirmative score (1) was coded when the participant used a justification category to support one of his or her responses to the question, and a negative score (0) was coded on each occasion the justification category was not utilized. The final score for each question represented the number of children utilizing the justification category for the domain of the act and authority. Children provided one justification in response to each question.

All interviews were tape-recorded for later coding. Two independent judges coded all of the protocols to obtain coding reliability; their inter-judge agreement based on Cohen's kappa was 100% for the judgment data and 92% for the justification data. Any disagreements were discussed and resolved by the judges.

## RESULTS

### *Statistical Procedures*

Due to the complexity in analyzing repeated categorical data, the judgment and the justification responses to forced-choice compliance to an authority's directive, legitimacy of rule-making by authority, and legit-



imacy of authority to permit the act, were analyzed separately by the authority dimension in a 2 (Context)  $\times$  2 (Domain)  $\times$  3 (Grade) log-linear procedure for repeated measures with domain being the repeated measure. The log-linear procedure takes into account multinomial response categories and repeated measurement of the categorical variables (Landis & Koch, 1979; Tisak, 1986). Weighted-least-squares estimation of the model parameters was implemented. Gender was included in the initial analyses. However, because there were no significant effects, gender was deleted as one of the parameters. Ratings of seriousness were analyzed in a 2 (Context)  $\times$  2 (Domain)  $\times$  2 (Authority)  $\times$  3 (Grade) ANOVA with domain and authority being the repeated measures. Gender was excluded as a variable because of the small cell size and because there has been no prior evidence of gender differences.

*Forced-choice compliance.* Children were asked to indicate whether a peer should comply to an authority's directive permitting an act or an authority's directive prohibiting the act. It was predicted that children would choose the authority prohibiting the act, especially within their respective contexts. The first set of analyses pertained to when a mother permitted the moral and the conventional transgressions to occur and a teacher prohibited the acts. The results indicated main effects for context,  $\chi^2(1, N = 94) = 8.69, p < .01$  and domain,  $\chi^2(1, N = 94) = 3.95, p < .05$ . When mothers permitted a moral transgression to occur and teachers prohibited the act, most children (average 90%) stated that peers should obey the teacher's directive, although the results were stronger in the school context. A somewhat different pattern occurred when the rule concerned a convention. Most children (89%) indicated that peers should listen to the teacher in the school context. In the home context, an almost equal number of children stated that the peer should listen to the mother and to the teacher (see Table 1).

First and third graders provided a reason or rationale to support their choice of which authority's directive the child should comply with. When mothers permitted the acts to occur, the results revealed a main effect for domain,  $\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 11.32, p < .05$ , and a Grade  $\times$  Domain interaction,  $\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 7.83, p < .05$ . In response to the moral transgression, children either referred to others' welfare ( $M = 38\%$ ), authority status ( $M = 32\%$ ), or social appropriateness ( $M = 25\%$ ). Grade differences were found in response to the conventional act. The majority of the third graders (61%) and fewer first graders (31%) referred to authority status. In comparison, the first graders (47%) referred to social appropriateness of the act, whereas few third graders (19%) did so.

The second set of analyses concerned children's evaluations when a teacher permitted the transgressions to occur across contexts and a mother

**Table 1.** Percentages of Children Responding to Forced-Choice Compliance to an Authority's Directive by Authority, Domain, and Context

Compliance	Condition 1. Mother permits/ teacher prohibits			
	Moral		Conventional	
	Home	School	Home	School
Mother	17	3	45	11
Teacher	83	97	55	89

Compliance	Condition 2. Teacher permits/ mother prohibits			
	Moral		Conventional	
	Home	School	Home	School
Mother	98	87	98	75
Teacher	2	13	2	25

Note. Percentages represent those children choosing to comply with either the mother or the teacher for two conditions: (1) when the mother permitted the moral and conventional acts to occur in the home and school context, but the teacher prohibited the acts to occur in both contexts, and (2) when the teacher permitted the moral and conventional acts to occur in the home and school context, but the mother prohibited the acts to occur in both contexts.

prohibited the acts from occurring. The results revealed a main effect for context,  $\chi^2(1, N = 94) = 4.49, p < .05$ . Although the majority of children stated that peers should comply with the mother's moral and conventional directives, this response was stronger in the home context (average 98%), as compared with the school context (average 81%). With regard to the justification data, the results indicated a main effect for domain,  $\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 16.14, p < .001$ . In response to the moral transgression, children again referred to others' welfare ( $M = 43\%$ ), authority status ( $M = 31\%$ ), and social appropriateness ( $M = 19\%$ ). However, in response to the conventional act, the majority of the children's reasons focused on either authority status ( $M = 45\%$ ) or social appropriateness ( $M = 40\%$ ).

In summary, when mothers permitted a moral transgression to occur across contexts, children indicated that peers should listen to the teacher who prohibited the act. However, this response was stronger in the school, as compared with the home setting. Likewise, when teachers permitted the moral transgression to occur, children stated that peers should comply with mothers' directive prohibiting the act, but this response was stronger in the home, as compared with the school setting. A different pattern was found for the conventional violation, especially when the authorities permitted versus prohibited the act.

**Table 2.** Percentages of Children Responding to Legitimacy of Rule-Making by Authority

Context	Mother		Teacher	
	Moral	Conventional	Moral	Conventional
Home	94	98	71	62
School	78	80	94	96

Note. Percentages represent those children who indicated that it would be legitimate for a mother or a teacher to prohibit the transgressions from occurring at home and at school.

*Legitimacy of rule-making by authority.* Children were asked whether it was legitimate for mothers and teachers to make a rule prohibiting moral and conventional transgressions from occurring at home and at school. It was expected that mothers and teachers have the authority to prohibit the moral and conventional acts only within their respective contexts. The analyses were first conducted separately by authority (i.e., mothers and teachers). The findings revealed a main effect for context, for mothers,  $\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 5.53, p < .05$ , and for teachers,  $\chi^2(1, N = 94) = 14.38, p < .001$ . The data in Table 2 indicate more children consider mothers to have authority in the home than in the school, whereas more children thought teachers have authority in the school than in the home.

In the next set of analyses we assessed whether children consider it legitimate for an authority to prohibit behaviors within a specific context. Significantly more children in the home context indicated that mothers, as compared with teachers, have a right to prohibit moral and conventional transgressions ( $M = 96\%$  and  $67\%$  for mothers and teachers, respectively),  $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 15.8, p < .001$ . In contrast, significantly fewer children in the school context indicated that mothers, as compared with teachers, have the right to prohibit the behaviors ( $M = 79\%$  and  $95\%$  for mothers and teachers, respectively),  $\chi^2(1, N = 46) = 4.64, p < .05$ .

When teachers prohibited the acts from occurring, the justification results revealed main effects for domain,  $\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 11.81, p < .01$ , and for grade,  $\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 8.35, p < .05$ . As shown in Table 3, for both moral and conventional acts, more third graders referred to authority status than did the first graders. Furthermore, third graders utilized authority status more for the conventional act than the moral transgression. In contrast, social appropriateness was utilized by more first graders than third graders, and again mainly for the conventional act.

A different pattern of children's justifications was found when mothers prohibited the acts from occurring. The results revealed a main effects for context,  $\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 10.89, p < .01$ , and for domain,  $\chi^2(2, N = 68)$

**Table 3.** Percentages of Justification Responses for Teachers' Legitimacy of Rule-Making by Grade and Domain

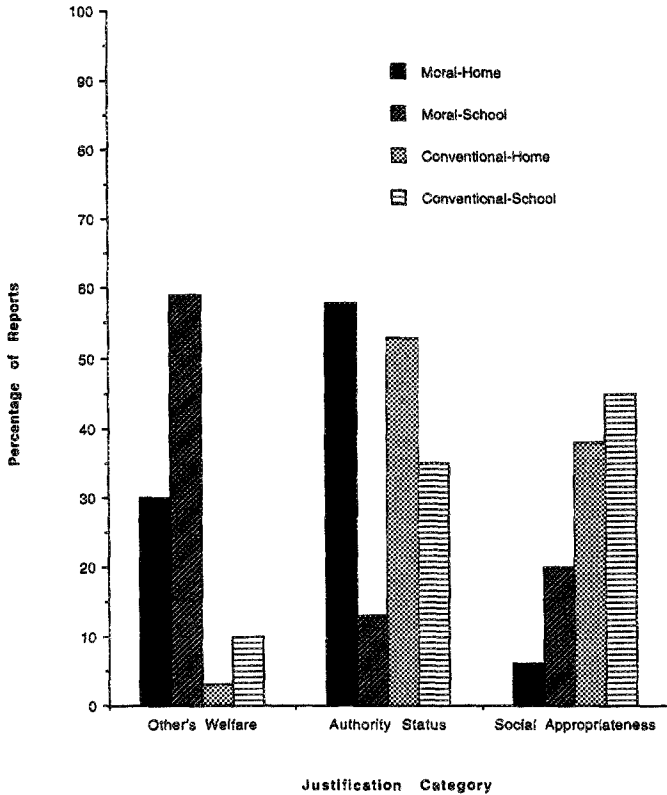
	Moral		Conventional	
	First	Third	First	Third
Other's welfare	29	37	10	6
Authority status	25	46	28	62
Social appropriateness	25	9	56	26
Other	21	8	7	6

= 18.62,  $p < .001$ . As illustrated in Figure 1, others' welfare was cited by more children for the moral transgression in the school context. Authority status was utilized by the majority of children for both moral and conventions, however only in the home context. Finally, social appropriateness was invoked by more children for the conventional act in the school context.

In summary, most children indicated that both mothers and teachers have the right to make moral and conventional rules that are applicable in both the home and the school settings. Nonetheless, significantly more children gave mothers the authority in the home context, as compared with the school context. Likewise, teachers had more authority in the school context than in the home.

*Legitimacy of authority to permit the act.* Children were asked whether it was legitimate for mothers and teachers to permit moral and conventional transgressions. It was predicted that children think it is not legitimate for either mothers or teachers to permit the moral transgressions to occur in either contexts. However, it was expected that children do consider it legitimate for mothers and teachers to permit conventional acts to occur only within their respective contexts. The data were analyzed separately by authority. When the authority figure was a mother, the results revealed main effects for context,  $\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 9.61, p < .01$ ; for grade,  $\chi^2(2, N = 95) = 11.7, p < .01$ ; and for domain,  $\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 4.8, p < .05$ . These results were qualified by a significant interaction between context and grade,  $\chi^2(2, N = 95) = 7.1, p < .05$ .

As illustrated in Table 4, significantly more children stated that it was not legitimate for mothers to permit a moral transgression, as compared with a conventional act. Moreover, the third graders, as compared with the preschoolers and the first graders, stated that mothers have the right to permit moral and conventional acts, but mainly in the home context. However, the results were stronger for the conventional rule than the moral rule. The justification results revealed a main effect for domain,



**Figure 1.** Percentages of justification responses for mothers' legitimacy of rule-making by domain and context.

$\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 14.53, p < .001$ . The majority of the children ( $M = 74\%$ ) referred to others' welfare and authority status when the act involved a moral event. In contrast, when the event was conventional, most children ( $M = 90\%$ ) referred to authority status and social appropriateness.

With regard to whether a teacher has a right to permit the acts, the results indicated main effects for context,  $\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 4.65, p < .05$ , and for grade,  $\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 5.75, p = .05$ . Children stated that teachers did not have the authority to permit moral or conventional transgressions to occur in the home, as compared with school. Furthermore, the third graders, compared with the younger children, indicated that it was legitimate for teachers to permit the behaviors to occur. The justification

**Table 4.** Percentages of Children Responding to Legitimacy of Authority to Permit Acts

Mother						
Context	Moral			Conventional		
	Preschool	First	Third	Preschool	First	Third
Home	94	81	50	87	75	7
School	93	100	100	92	88	76

Teacher						
Context	Moral			Conventional		
	Preschool	First	Third	Preschool	First	Third
Home	100	100	94	93	94	80
School	86	94	76	85	79	41

Note. Percentages represent those children who indicated that it would not be legitimate for the act to be permitted by mothers and teachers at home and at school.

results revealed a main effect for domain,  $\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 10.42, p < .01$ . In response to the moral act, most children (80%) referred to others' welfare and authority status, whereas for the conventional act most children (91%) referred to authority status and social appropriateness.

In summary, most preschoolers and first graders did not consider it legitimate for either mothers or teachers to permit the moral and conventional acts to occur in the home or in the school context. However, the teachers had more authority in the school context, whereas mothers had the authority in the home context. In comparison to the younger children, significantly more third graders stated that mothers had the authority to permit the moral and conventional acts to occur in the home, whereas the teachers had this authority in the school, although the results were stronger for the conventional act than the moral event.

*Ratings of seriousness.* Children evaluated the seriousness of the transgression committed by a child when one authority figure permitted the act to occur and the second prohibited the act. It was predicted that children consider moral transgressions to be more serious, in comparison to conventional violations, regardless of the context or the authority permitting the acts. The results indicated a main effect for grade,  $F(2, 78) = 17.4, p < .001$ , which was qualified by a significant interaction between domain and grade,  $F(2, 78) = 7.95, p < .001$ . As Figure 2 illustrates, the moral transgression was rated the same degree of wrongness by preschoolers, first graders, and third graders. However, the third graders, as compared with the younger children, considered the conventional vio-

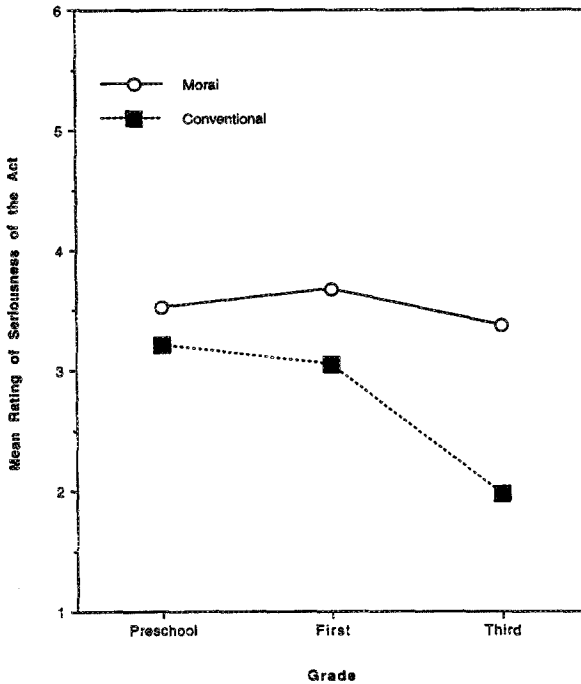


Figure 2. Ratings of seriousness of act by grade and domain.

lation to be less wrong,  $t(91) = 6.7, p < .001$ . A moral transgression was considered to be more wrong than a conventional transgression, by the first graders,  $t(30) = 3.73, p < .01$ , and by the third graders,  $t(32) = 7.13, p < .001$ .

The findings for the ratings of seriousness of the act revealed an interaction between authority and context,  $F(1, 78) = 15.99, p < .001$ , which was qualified by a significant three-way interaction among authority, grade, and context,  $F(2, 78) = 3.42, p < .05$ . The data, which are presented in Table 5, indicate that when mothers allowed the transgressions to occur (and the teachers prohibited the acts), the third graders considered the acts to be more wrong in the school context, as compared with the home context,  $t(24) = 4.20, p < .001$ . When a teacher permitted the acts to occur (and the mothers prohibited the behaviors), significantly more preschoolers and first graders, as compared with the third graders, considered the behaviors to be more wrong at home,  $t(44) = 3.77, p < .001$ , and at school,  $t(44) = 2.51, p < .05$ .

**Table 5.** Mean Ratings of Seriousness of Act by Authority, Grade, and Context

Context	Authority					
	Mother permits/ teacher prohibits			Teacher permits/ mother prohibits		
	Preschool	First	Third	Preschool	First	Third
Home	3.33 (0.65)	3.27 (0.70)	2.16 (0.68)	3.46 (0.54)	3.56 (0.57)	2.84 (0.63)
School	3.38 (0.48)	3.41 (0.66)	2.97 (0.41)	3.35 (0.43)	3.19 (0.85)	2.71 (0.77)

*Note.* Means represent the degree of wrongness of the act (1 = not wrong to 4 = very wrong), when (a) the mother permits the acts and the teacher prohibits the acts, and (b) when the teacher permits the acts and the mother prohibits the acts. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

In summary, the third graders considered the acts to be less wrong in both contexts in comparison to the younger children, regardless of who permitted the acts. However, the third graders considered the acts to be more wrong in the school setting when teachers prohibit the behaviors.

*Ranking of seriousness.* Children made forced-choice comparisons of the wrongness between two children who violated the rules. It was predicted that children who violated the moral rule are considered more wrong than children who violated the conventional rule. As expected, the majority of children indicated that the child who violated the moral rule was more wrong as compared with the child who committed the conventional violation, regardless of whether it was (a) the teacher's moral rule and the act occurred at home ( $M = 74\%$  of the children) or at school ( $M = 93\%$  of the children), or (b) it was the mother's moral rule and the act occurred at home ( $M = 96\%$  of the children) or at school ( $M = 94\%$  of the children). There were no significant main effects or interactions. When asked to provide a rationale for their choice, the majority of children ( $M = 64\%$ ) referred to others' welfare regardless of whether it was the mother's rule or the teacher's rule.

## DISCUSSION

The present study extends prior investigations on young children's concepts of authority by directly manipulating in concert (a) two salient authorities in the child's life, (b) their directives, (c) the context from which the directives were drawn, and (d) the domain of the directive. The overall findings demonstrate that young children's thinking about authority is a function of each of these factors as well as the age of the participant. Several key findings are highlighted.



Children considered it legitimate for mothers and teachers to formulate rules prohibiting both moral and conventional behaviors (see Legitimacy of Rule-Making by Authority). These particular findings are consistent with other research showing that under certain situations young children grant authorities the right to formulate or to generate conventional as well as moral rules (Tisak & Tisak, 1990). That is, even though conventional rules are considered arbitrary by children (Turiel, 1983, 1998), they recognize that particular behaviors violate social custom (Tisak & Turiel, 1988; Turiel, 1983; Weston & Turiel, 1980) or, as the present data suggest, are not socially appropriate and, therefore, should be regulated across settings. At the same time, it is important to note that the current findings extend those reported previously (Laupa & Turiel, 1993) by revealing that young children consider an authority's jurisdiction to transcend contexts for both the moral and the conventional rules. Nonetheless, the current results also show that mothers have more authority in the home than in the school, whereas the reverse is true for teachers.

The results revealed that the jurisdiction of mothers and teachers does not extend to allowing either the moral or the conventional acts to occur. However, this finding was stronger for the moral transgressions. Furthermore, more children stated that mothers had the right to permit the moral and conventional acts to occur at home than in school, whereas the teachers had the right to permit these acts in the school than in the home. As Dunbar and Taylor (1982) report, children recognize the difference between formal and informal authority. Hence, the current data imply that children accept mothers' and teachers' formal and informal authority when the authorities prohibit acts from occurring regardless of the context. However, children do not consider mothers' and teachers' informal authority to transcend contexts when the authorities permit these same acts to occur across contexts. In other words, although children consider the values and rules of different authority figures, they are able to evaluate whether a particular rule warrants obeying, regardless of the context and the authority expounding the directive.

With regard to the justification data, the current findings indicated that children did respond to moral acts by referring to others' welfare, which is congruent with previous findings (see Helwig et al., 1990; Turiel 1998, for a review). However, children also referred to authority status and social appropriateness justifications in response to the moral rule. This is an interesting finding given that these two justification categories are usually associated with the conventional domain (Turiel, 1998). In fact, children in the current study did refer to authority status and social appropriateness in response to the conventional rule.

One explanation as to the reason conventional justifications were given by children in response to the moral act is that the questions focused directly on authority and thus, authority issues were salient to the children. However, the pattern of conventional reasoning to support moral judgments, as reported in the current study, was not congruent with those reported in previous research on children's authority concepts (see Tisak, 1995, for a review). A second explanation is that children's judgments may be influenced by three interrelated factors: the status of the authority, the context, as well as the domain of the act. As an example, children attributed different justifications to support their judgments for teachers' versus mothers' rules (e.g., Legitimacy of Rule-Making by Authority question) based on these three factors. That is, although authority status was utilized by children in response to both mothers and teachers, children referred to authority status in response to teachers across both home and school contexts. A different pattern was reported for mothers in that authority status was used significantly more often in the home context than the school context.

A possible explanation for these findings is that children's first experiences with an authority occurs mainly in the home context. Dunbar and Taylor (1982) reported that children with increasing age begin to understand both the formal and the informal roles on the part of teachers and they may expect to have the teachers' authority extend across contexts. Furthermore, with greater experience children learn that teachers may also be parents. Therefore, they may consider that a teacher's authority also can extend to the home. With regard to mothers, children may not perceive mothers as having authority status across settings (Damon, 1980) and, therefore, conceptualize mothers as an authority figure only in the home setting.

Finally, there were several interesting age differences that should be noted, especially with regard to the responses to legitimacy of authority to permit the acts, ratings of seriousness, and the justification data. In comparison to the younger children, third graders recognize the rights of mothers and teachers to permit the acts to occur in their respective contexts. This was especially interesting in that the third graders thought it was all right for mothers (50% of the third graders) and teachers (24% of the third graders) to permit moral transgressions to occur in their respective settings. There are several interpretations of these results. One is that because third graders, in comparison to the younger children, have a greater understanding of the ascribed characteristics of the attributes of mothers and teachers in positions of authority (Cullen, 1987; Dunbar & Taylor, 1982), they grant them greater latitude as to what directives they expound. By third grade, children may have gained a greater respect for

authority figures, such as mothers and teachers, and trust their directives, whether it be prohibiting or permitting an act to occur.

A second explanation is that by third grade children may be at a different level of development in which they are trying to understand the various complexities of authority (e.g., why some rules are more acceptable than others; who can ascribe different rules), which may result in their accepting authorities' decisions when they may not have done so at younger or older ages. For example, Tisak (1986) reported that third graders, in comparison to their younger and older peers (first and fifth graders), indicated that parents have a right to formulate rules that their peers found to be unacceptable.

Another example of grade differences noted in the present study pertained to the ratings of seriousness. Although the moral violation was rated similarly by children across the three age groups, the third graders rated the conventional act as being less wrong than did the younger children. One explanation is that the third graders consistently utilized authority status (e.g., they permitted the act to occur) to support their conventional judgments, whereas the younger children (first graders) instead referred to the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of the conventional act. Again, these data suggest that persons in specific positions of authority (e.g., mothers and teachers) may have more significance for third grade children than for their younger peers. These findings also demonstrate that even young children recognize when a rule is appropriate (Tisak & Turiel, 1988; Weston & Turiel, 1980).

Although the current findings contribute to the existing body of literature on children's authority concepts, several limitations need to be addressed. First, it would have been useful to obtain justification data from the preschool children to better understand their conceptions of authority. A possible approach in future research would be to provide two different justifications (e.g., other's welfare, authority) and have them select the one that they find most appropriate. Second, because the third graders were more accepting of an authority's right to permit acts to occur than were the younger children, it would be helpful in future research to include children in older age groups or to follow the children longitudinally to assess whether their own conceptions change over time. Third, the current data suggest that with increasing age children may grant specific authorities greater latitude in expounding a directive across contexts. Therefore, it may be important to also extend this research by including other authorities who are salient in an older child's life (e.g., principal, police). Finally, it would be interesting to investigate further the reasons why a teacher's authority is considered acceptable across contexts, whereas a mother's authority status is considered legitimate mainly in the home setting.

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