

Children See Rabbit, Not Peter: Young Children's Responses to an Anthropomorphic Picture Scale

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Does a rabbit have feelings – like happy and sad?



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Introduction

- Anthropomorphism is the endowment of patently human thoughts, feelings, goals and behaviours to non-human animals or objects (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007; Waytz, Cacioppo, & Epley, 2010).
- Anthropomorphic characters are prevalent in picture books aimed at young children (Kotaman & Balci, 2017; Marriott, 2002).
- Differences in the extent to which 5- to 9-year-olds attribute thoughts, feelings, self-knowledge and intention to animals, natural objects and technology has been demonstrated (Severson & Lemm, 2016).

Research Aims

Examine children's internal state attributions for real and anthropomorphised animals relative to humans.

Participants

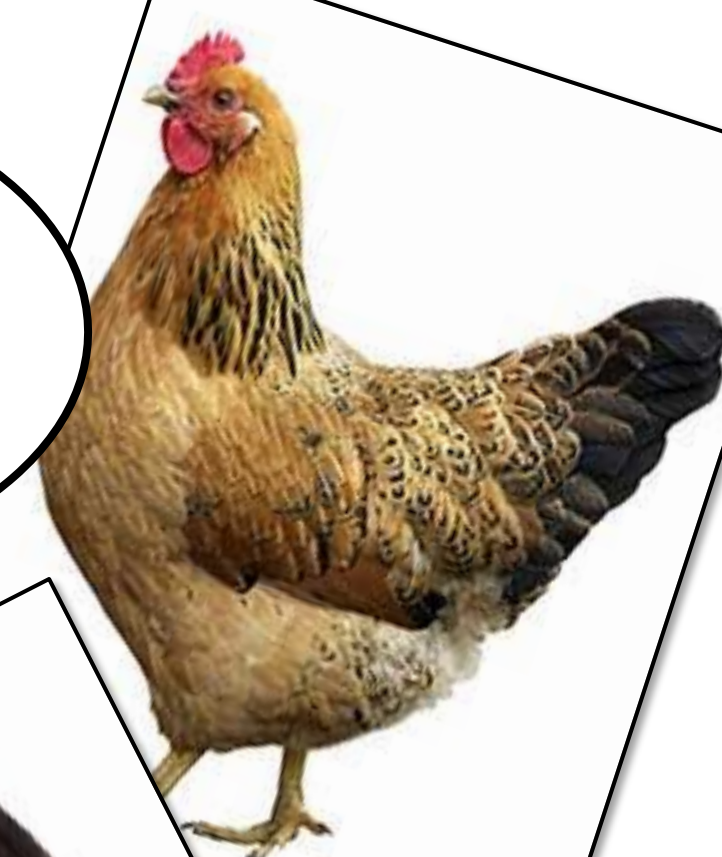
184 children aged 3 to 7 years ($M_{age} = 66.55$ months, $SD = 14.15$) were recruited

Method

Children rated capacities for thought, feeling, self-knowledge and intention for items in four main categories:

Animals

Does a chicken know it's a chicken?



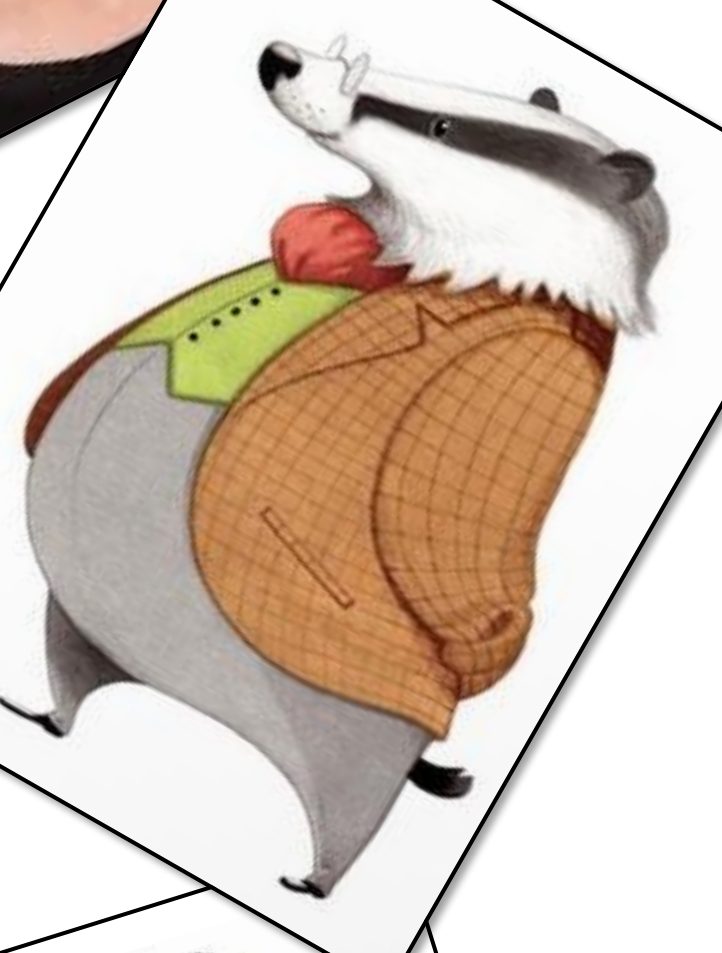
Humans

Does a person do things on purpose?



Anthropomorphised animals

Does a badger have feelings like happy and sad?

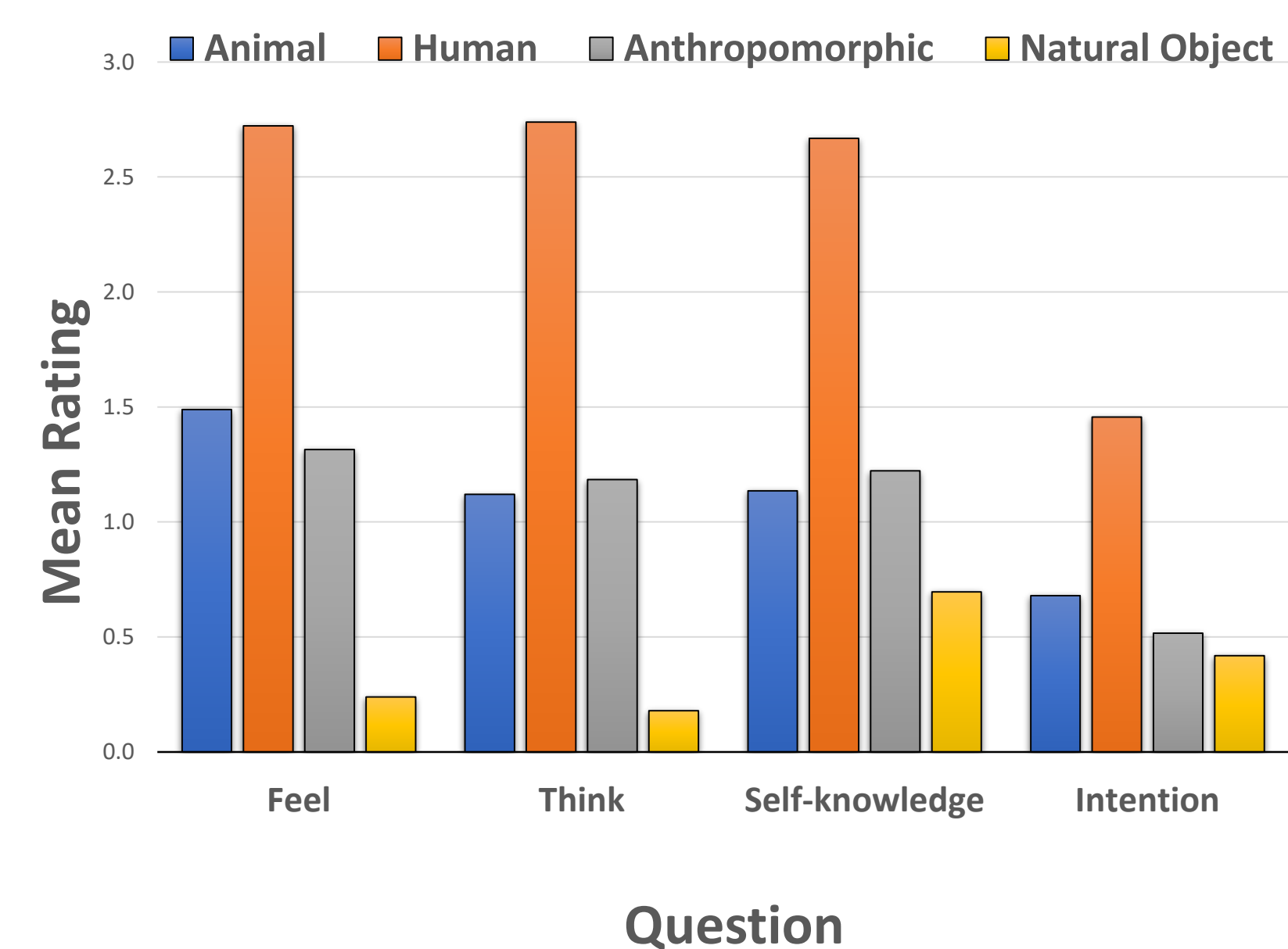


Inanimate natural objects (benchmark)

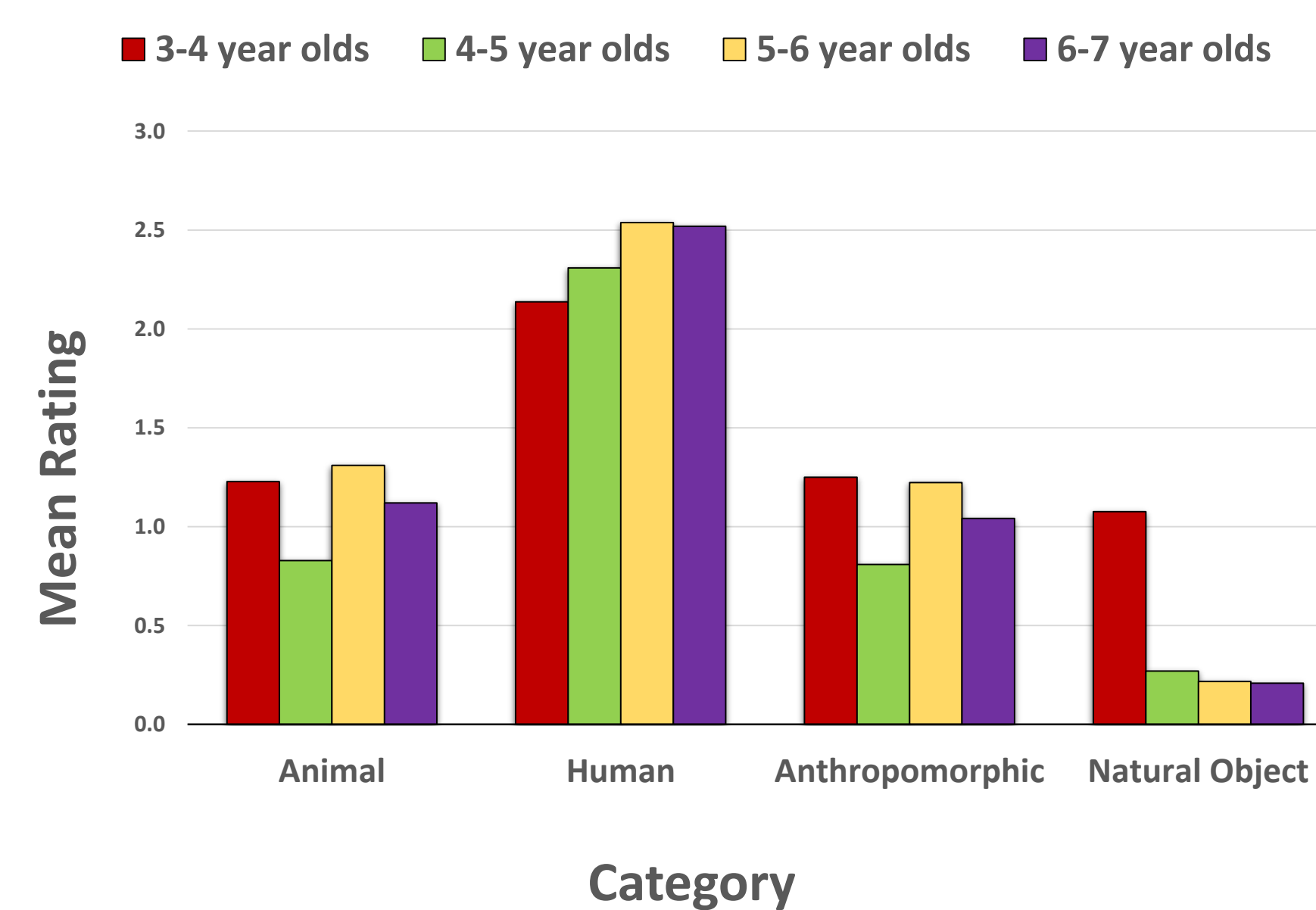
Does a stone think?



Results & Conclusions



Young children view anthropomorphised animals as animals, rather than imagining that they have similar capacities for mental and emotional states as humans.

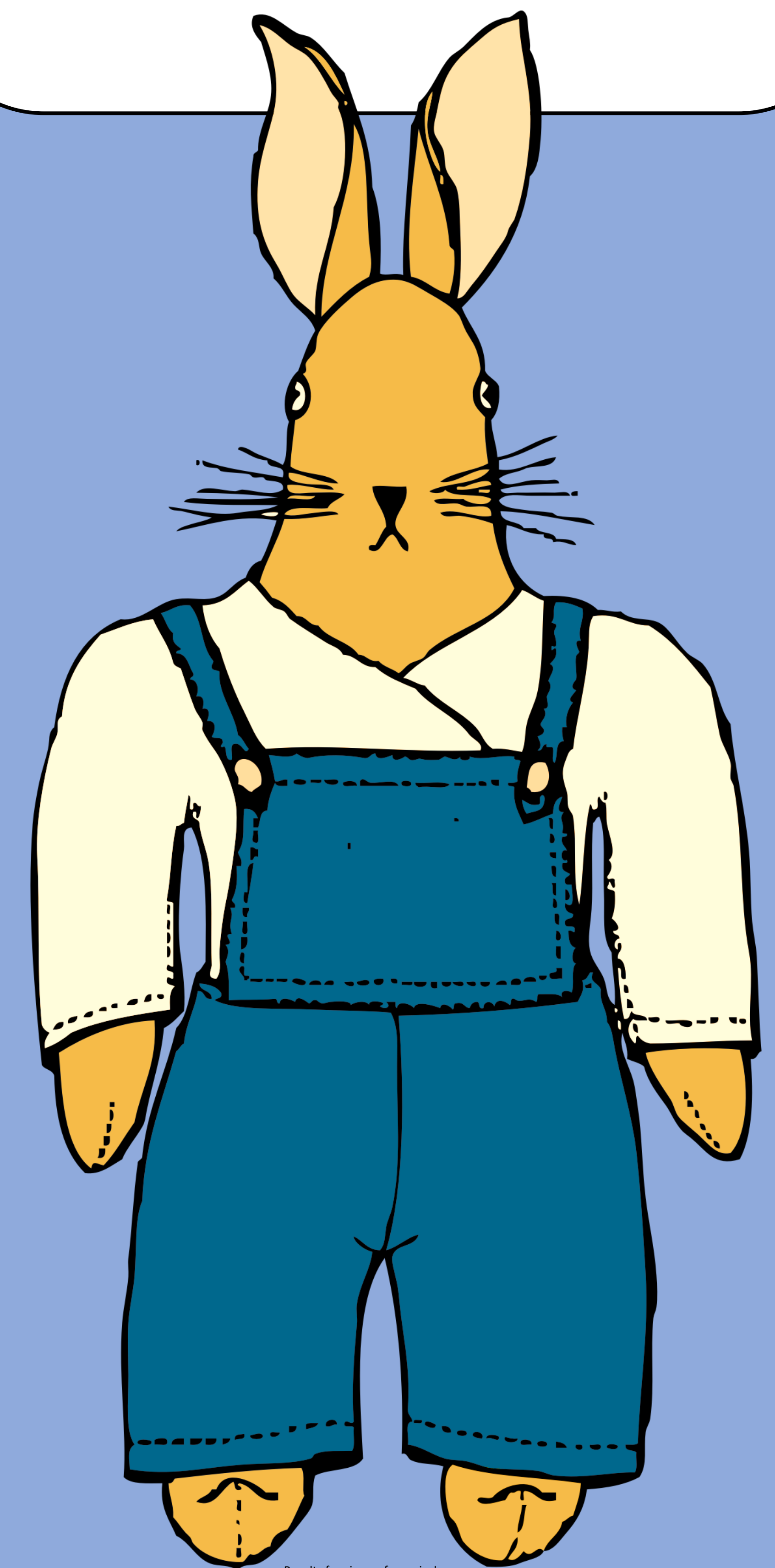


The youngest age group provided higher ratings than other age groups for natural objects.

Future Directions

This scale is now being related to two studies:

- Children's prosocial behaviour in response to moral stories with human or anthropomorphic protagonists
- Children's use of internal state language when recalling human or anthropomorphic versions of stories



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