

# The Development of Children's Understanding of Humility

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## Abstract

Fifteen children (six female, nine male) between the ages of four and six were given modesty paradigms to test their understanding of doing good for its intrinsic value or to receive social praise. We were interested to find at which point performing good deeds for their intrinsic values became as (or more) important than receiving social praise. While the children understood that bragging was improper, they still thought "telling" about good deeds was acceptable under all conditions. Second, the children were evaluated for their level of tolerance for other's divergent behaviors. The behaviors presented were both moral and conventional actions, and we found that tolerance was apparent, but not when moral norms were broken, such as causing harm.

## Introduction

Humility manifests itself both as a modest view of one's own accomplishments (Snow, 1995), and an openness to new ideas (Tangney, 2000). Humble individuals do not view their personal achievements as indications of greater self-worth (e.g., "I won the poetry contest because I am smarter than everyone else") and, therefore, tend to shy away from praise and recognition. This is not to say that humble individuals suffer from low self-esteem; rather, they have a realistic sense of who they are, what they are capable of, and what they know, given the constraints inherent to the human condition. Additionally, humble individuals do not identify their personal opinions/practices as the only legitimate ones, what is 'right' or 'normal,' and, therefore, are open to and tolerant of the practices of others. Though humble people can certainly be principled, they nonetheless remain receptive to new information and ideas.

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As the above suggests, humility can be broken down into (at least) two distinct dimensions: modesty and tolerance. Among other things, modesty involves a non-inflated view of oneself, one's accomplishments, and overall worth—and thus, a reluctance to seek praise and social recognition. Tolerance requires an openness to ideas, beliefs, values, and experiences that are not one's own, a willingness to value differing opinions.

While some philosophers, such as Nietzsche, argue that humility is a debilitating trait, with humility comes the empowering understanding of an individual's ability to achieve despite the negative qualities innate to humanity. Humility is important because it allows for a stable self-perception that can withstand social criticism while at the same allowing for the adaptation of beliefs when presented with relevant, compelling information. Because of this, it could be argued that without humility, individuals are vulnerable to narcissism and egocentrism, focusing on their strengths and ignoring their weaknesses, thereby overinflating their self-worth. The nature of humility counters this by providing a humbling experience that forces introspection and rationalization of beliefs. That is to say, humility counteracts egocentrism—both in the individual and in society.

While humility is generally regarded as a virtue, its relationship to the moral domain is not well understood. An issue is morally relevant if it involves issues of harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, authority/respect, in-group/out-group membership, and purity/disgust (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Humility involves being modest, both internally and externally, when receiving praise for ability achievements (i.e. achievements due to personal skill). Modest behavior is equally (if not more) important in response to praise for *moral* achievements, since we expect individuals to behave morally for the good of others rather than from a desire for positive personal recognition. Humility also requires being tolerant to the practices of others. However, our moral beliefs often compel us to stand against practices deemed morally wrong. Thus, it would not be unusual for a humble person to express intolerance in the form of an unwillingness to abide by (or participate in) something they take to be immoral. This dimension of humility has a more complex interaction with the moral domain and will be further discussed later.

Humility is a difficult construct to study at any age, as we would expect truly humble individuals to underreport their own humility, and any self-reports of humility would constitute immodesty/bragging (Davis et al., 2011). Therefore, the current research explores young children's *understanding* of humility along the two distinct dimensions: modesty and openness/tolerance.

### **Dimension 1: Modesty**

In order to appreciate modesty, children must be able to conceptualize self-presentation, which is the understanding that individuals can shape the impressions people have of them by use of their own behaviors (Goffman, 1959). Children must recognize that actors can manipulate the attributions made about them by others through their own efforts (Bennett & Yeeles, 2001). Research shows that children as young as five have the cognitive ability to understand the importance of self-presentation behavior in the form of emotional display rules (Banerjee & Yuill, 1999). Emotional display rules in certain contexts require a specific outward display of emotions, regardless of one's internal emotional state (e.g., when receiving a gift, you should act pleased, even if you are not). However, an appreciation of (or preference for) modest behavior likely requires more than this basic understanding.

Modesty is the presentation of one's skillful or good deeds as ordinary, feats that would/could have been accomplished by anyone who made the necessary preparation and put forth the necessary effort. Modest individuals typically do not regard their deeds as unique to themselves but accomplishable by anyone who would have been in a similar situation, making external praise unnecessary.

But when do children learn that pro-sociality is intrinsically good and doesn't require social praise? A preference for modesty over immodesty, or "bragging," cannot be cultivated without the development of self-presentation. The characteristics attributed by others form one's reputation and are important in the understanding of social dynamics, playing a key role in socialization. In the early stages of development, obtaining positive character evaluations is deemed more important than obtaining positive ability evaluations (Banerjee, 2000). This suggests that social constructs play a key role in individuals' understanding of modesty and perception of modest behaviors as beneficial.

Individuals typically wish to associate with others who show a greater capacity and willingness to work in a group by being less egotistical (i.e., feelings of deserving more than is justified by their deeds; Rawls, 1999), thereby benefitting fellow in-group members (Darwin, 1874). Children who develop a higher sensitivity to the interpersonal dynamics of social situations have been found to have a higher appreciation for modest behavior (Bennett & Yeeles 1990).

Research on modesty has demonstrated that young children first comprehend self-presentation in problematic situations where it is clear that their genuine emotional response would be inappropriate, (e.g., "My aunt gave me a present I did not like, but I pretended to like it so her feelings wouldn't be hurt"), but this behavior

does not often generalize to everyday interactions (Bennett & Yeeles, 1990). According to Bennett and Yeeles, children are taught to display self-preserving behaviors—such as falsely displaying facial responses and being thankful when not—when not doing so could have potential unwanted consequences. This supports the notion that a fundamental component of modesty, self-presentation, is initially taught and reinforced through interpersonal social situations.

Possible reasons for children's lack of self-presentation have been attributed to the limited amount of social influence that young children receive from their surroundings and/or to the lack of executive functioning required to modulate self-presentation (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002).

Knafo, Zahn-Waxler, Van Hulle, Robinson, & Rhee (2008) suggest the ability to differentiate between modest and non-modest behaviors increases over the early stages of development, as do demonstrations of pro-social behavior. Supportive of this, Banerjee (2000) found that children's preference for modesty increases with age. Children ages 6-10 were asked to choose between a modest or immodest self-description for a protagonist attending a new school. Banerjee (2000) found that although the older (8-10) children tended to prefer modest descriptions (as well as to justify the behavior in terms of social evaluation), only 56% of them chose the modest option in both stories provided. These findings indicate development of a modesty norm that for young children is applicable in some contexts, but not others.

Will modesty be a salient norm in the moral domain? Given that moral behavior is highly salient for young children (for some, perhaps even more salient than personal achievement), it is likely to facilitate a modesty norm. Yet, children lack the ability to automatically, without conscious effort, value intrinsically good behaviors in social contexts, when social rewards (e.g., praise) are available, before the age of ten (Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005).

Watling and Banerjee (2007) found that children do not develop an adequate understanding of modesty until adolescence and, still, then it is only significantly observed when the primary audience is one's peers. When asked to choose between a modest or immodest response to praise, children were more likely to choose modest responses when the praise came from a peer. This supports the notion that young children will not be able to distinguish between doing good for its intrinsic value versus doing it for perceived social consequences. So, while young children have the capacity to value modesty, the perception of modest behaviors as more valuable than non-modest behaviors doesn't seem to be as important until later

stages of childhood development.

Watling and Banerjee's (2007) results support the notion that modesty develops as a self-presentational tactic to promote social acceptance. Although they found that social acceptance justifications for modest behavior increase with age, they also found that justifications referring to others' feelings were positively correlated with a preference for modest responses. Essentially a concern for the wellbeing of others (i.e., being modest so that the audience does not feel inferior) predicts a preference for modesty.

This finding illustrates a critical difference between false modesty and humble modesty in one's internal motivations for modest behavior: one may act modestly with the hope of being viewed more positively by social standards or to the benefit of the audience. It is possible the latter pro-social motivation is more virtuous and therefore a characteristic of true humility. However, even if modest behavior is pro-socially motivated, it is still a form of self-presentation. Behaving modestly in order to protect the feelings of others implies that the actor is inhibiting his/her true reaction (e.g., excitement) for the good of others. By contrast, individuals that do not consider their achievements to be praiseworthy are *internally* modest. This internal modesty provides an important distinction between modesty and humility, and characterizes truly humble individuals. Such individuals display modest behaviors because they truly do not believe their achievements to be worthy of praise.

### **Dimension 2: Openness to tolerance**

While a humble person is expected to be open and accepting of beliefs and practices that are different or contradictory to his/her own, at the same time, a moral agent is expected to adhere to his/her moral beliefs across all contexts. In this sense, humility and moral identity appear to conflict with each other. Some of the most widely regarded moral exemplars are admired because of their ability to promote their worldview against overwhelming opposition. Moral exemplars (e.g., Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr.) typically insist that their view of how the world should be is morally superior to the one promoted by their opponents.

Are such individuals lacking in humility? Certainly those we consider to be moral exemplars do not seem egotistical. This may be due to the prosocial/moral nature of their actions. Exemplars typically a) express intolerance without causing further harm, and b) are motivated by concern for the welfare of others. Also, being tolerant does not require that we are tolerant of everything—it requires a line to be drawn between when it is appropriate to be open and accepting of different

values/practices and when it is not. When faced with divergent beliefs or practices, individuals must decide if the norm is merely unusual/abnormal or whether it constitutes a moral norm violation.

This second dimension of humility appears in children earlier than modest behavior. Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam, and Lewis (2004) studied 5-, 7-, and 9-year-olds' tolerance for moral, taste, fact, and ambiguous fact disagreements. The researchers found that children were less tolerant of morally relevant divergent beliefs and more likely to tolerate non-morally relevant divergent beliefs. Additionally, intolerance for divergent moral beliefs was consistently justified by referencing concerns for the welfare and fair treatment of others. Divergent beliefs that were not perceived as resulting in harm or unfair treatment were more likely to be tolerated and understood as a matter of personal choice. This was true even for the five year olds; however, they were found to be less tolerant overall than the older age groups (Wainryb et al., 2004).

Given these findings, it is possible that children are able to understand this dimension of humility at an early age. It appears that children possess the ability to discriminate between universally applicable norms and norms that are flexible to context. Where children draw this line corresponds with the moral realm. As 5-year-olds were found to be less tolerant in general, it is possible that younger children assign moral value to a wider range of beliefs and are, therefore, less willing to accept divergence from such beliefs.

Indeed, Wright (2012) found that children classified more issues as moral than did adolescents, and that divergence from moral beliefs produced the same level of discomfort regardless of belief intensity. By contrast, adolescents more often classified the same issues as matters of personal choice. These results suggest that with the development of autonomy, individuals categorize more decisions within the personal realm and, thus, become more tolerant of divergent practices. Wright (2012) also found that younger children were significantly less sensitive than adolescents to contextual factors of divergent beliefs. Younger children appear to draw more concrete lines between right and wrong behavior that are universally applicable. That is, younger children have a difficulty seeing what they would consider as matters of fact, such as violence always being wrong, as truly being a matter of opinion.

### **The Present Study**

The present study aimed to establish a baseline for the early development of

children's understanding of humility. We define 'moral humility' as a) behaving modestly when praised for doing what is right (i.e., behaving morally), and b) sensing when it is appropriate to be open and accepting of other's practices and when it is not (because they involve violations of moral norms).

Children between the ages of 4 and 6 were presented with a series of puppet shows to evaluate their understanding of humility. In regards to the first dimension, modest behavior, we predicted that children at this age would prefer immodest over modest behavior, regardless of whether a protagonist behaved morally or achieved something due to personal skill. This would indicate that a modesty norm has not been established at this age, even within morally relevant scenarios. With respect to the second dimension of humility, tolerance and openness to divergent beliefs/practices, we predicted that children would be able to distinguish when it is appropriate to be tolerant and when it is not. Further, we predicted that children would draw this line in accordance with the moral domain: children would be less open to behavior that conflicts with moral norms and more open to practices that contradict conventional norms.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Fifteen children (six female, nine male) between the ages of four and six from the Early Childhood Development Center (ECDC) at the College of Charleston were observed for this study. Children participated with parental consent.

### **Materials**

The experimental sessions took place in the reading room at the Early Childhood Development center. Seven plush "Happy Kids Hand Puppets" approximately fourteen inches tall were used to present each scenario to the participants. The puppets resembled male and female children with various hair, skin, and clothing colors. Two-dimensional images taped to long craft sticks were used as props when needed (e.g., a kitten, a bicycle). A "stage" for the puppet shows was built by cutting a square from a 3x4 foot display board. The stage was placed at one end of an oval table, and each participant watched the puppet shows while sitting at the other end of the table with a second experimenter. All responses were recorded with a standard digital audio recorder.

A Theory of Mind false-belief task (Wimmer & Perner, 1983) was also given to each participant. In addition to the materials already mentioned, two boxes (one

yellow, one blue) and a small red ball were used to present the task to each child.

## Design

The experiment utilized a repeated measures (within-subjects) design. The two dimensions of humility were examined separately. For the first dimension of openness/tolerance, the type of norm advocated by the group served as the independent variable. This factor involved two moral norms (e.g., throwing rocks at children) and three conventional norms (e.g., reading books upside down) that were promoted by a group.

For the second dimension of humility, modest behavior, the nature of a protagonist's achievement served as the independent variable. Three scenarios involved a protagonist behaving in a prosocial/moral way (e.g., sharing his/her lunch), and two involved a personal achievement due to some skill (e.g., winning a bike race). Children were asked questions after each story in both scenarios, and their responses served as the dependent variable for the experiment.

## Procedure

Children's understanding of moral humility was studied in two experimental phases. These phases allowed us to isolate and explore children's understanding of the two major components of humility. Both phases followed a similar structure: an experimenter presented a series of puppet shows while another experimenter sat with the child. After each puppet show, the experimenter sitting with the child would ask him/her a series of questions. Each participant was tested on both phases, which occurred on two separate days more than a week apart in order to avoid participant fatigue.

### *Tolerance (Phase 1)*

The goal of the first phase was to explore children's sense of when it is appropriate to be open and accepting of other people's values/practices and when it is not (i.e., tolerance). In each story, the protagonist is attending his/her first day at a new school, where all the kids at the school like to do a particular behavior. The following script provides an example of the format for each puppet show:

Narrator: This is Joe (Joe walks into view)

Joe: "Hello!"

Narrator: Today is Joe's first day at a brand new school.

Joe: "I'm really excited about starting school!"

Narrator: At this school, all the other kids only like to wear yellow shirts.

They want Joe to only wear yellow shirts just like them.



*Peer: "We only wear yellow shirts! You should only wear yellow shirts too!"*

In three scenarios, the students at the new school promoted a conventional group norm (e.g., wear yellow shirts; read books upside down). Two additional scenarios involved the students promoting a morally relevant norm (e.g., throw rocks at other children). After this dialogue, the questions were asked in the following order:

1. What is it that the other kids want Joe to do?
2. Puppet asks: What do you think I should do? (child answers)
  - a. *If yes, he should:* what if Joe refused to wear only yellow shirts? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)
  - a. *If no, he shouldn't:* What if Joe did wear only yellow shirts? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)

Question one served as a comprehension question to ensure the participant understood the norm being promoted. Children were asked to decide if the protagonist should participate in the behavior and also asked to consider the alternative (question 2a/2b). With parental consent, responses were audio recorded for later coding. Each participant was asked to reason through every scenario, and the experimenter partially counterbalanced the order of the puppet shows by selecting a new sequence for each participant. For a full script of each scenario, see Appendix A.

### *Modesty (Phase 2)*

Phase two of the experiment aimed to evaluate children's sense of a moral person's internal humbleness (i.e., modesty), the feeling of doing what is right simply because it was what was called for (not because he/she was a better person), and the lack of desire for public accolades and recognition. The same puppets and experimental setting from phase one were used. In each phase two scenario, the protagonist engaged in some type of admirable behavior. Below is an example of the format for each phase two puppet show:

*Bobby loves outdoor recess. One day at school Bobby was playing outside and saw a kitty was drowning in a big puddle and he jumped in to save him. Bobby knew saving the kitty would get his nice new clothes all wet and dirty but he jumped in anyway because he wanted to save the kitty. Afterwards, Bobby brought the kitty to the grown up to keep the kitty safe. (see Appendix A for full list of scenarios)*

Five different scenarios were presented, three of which involved the protagonist engaging in a moral behavior (e.g., protecting a kid from bullies, saving a kitten from drowning in a puddle). The other two scenarios involved personal achievement (e.g., winning a bike race). After each puppet show, the child was asked a series of questions about the story:

1. *What was it that Bobby did?*
2. *Should Bobby's parents and teachers praise him for what he did? (Why/why not)*
3. *Should Bobby be proud of himself for what he did? (Why/why not)*
4. *Should Bobby brag (show off) to his friends and family about what he did? (why/why not)*
5. *Would it be okay if Bobby didn't say anything to his friends and family about what he did, but kept it a secret? (why/why not)*

Responses were audio recorded with parental consent. Again, the order of conditions was partially counterbalanced by choosing a new sequence for each participant. (see Appendix A for full list of modesty scenarios).

#### *Theory of Mind*

A final theory of mind (TOM) test was administered to all participants and followed the standard experimental model of this task. It was important to administer this task as it displays an understanding of theory of mind: understanding that others have beliefs that are different from one's own. Children watched a puppet show in which Lucy hides her favorite toy (a small red ball) underneath one of two boxes (one yellow, one blue). After Lucy hides her ball under the yellow box, she goes outside to play. Her brother Bobby then enters and accidentally finds the ball. Bobby moves the ball to the blue box in order to play a trick on his sister. After this, children are asked:

1. *Where did Lucy originally hide the ball?*
2. *Where did her brother Bobby hide it?*
3. *Where will Lucy look for her ball when she comes inside?*

After the last question is asked, Lucy comes in and looks under the yellow box for her ball. All children in the current experiment passed the theory of mind task on the first attempt. If the child had not answered the last question correctly, the experimenter would have asked the child to explain why Lucy looked under the yellow box. This would continue until the child said either a) "I don't know" or b) "she must have thought that's where it was." Answering the final question cor-

rectly or reasoning that Lucy must have thought her ball was under the yellow box constitutes passing the theory of mind task, demonstrating that children are able to take the perspective of another individual and recognize that individual's beliefs are separate from their own. Again, all children in this study passed the TOM task, so the experimenter did not need to prompt further reasoning.

## Results

### Tolerance (Phase 1)

Regarding the tolerance dimension of humility, it was hypothesized that children between the ages of four and six will be able to accept the divergent conventional practices of others, but have trouble accepting behavior that opposes a moral norm. Consistent with this hypothesis, the data indicate that children's willingness to engage in a behavior promoted by a group changed as a function of the type of behavior. Children were first asked to make a decision for the protagonist: whether he/she should or should not engage in the behavior (i.e., a spontaneous response). While 47% of participants thought that the protagonist should not wear only yellow shirts, 73% of children believed that he/she should not read books upside down, 93% believed that he/she should not pick his/her nose/eat boogers, 80% of children believed that she/he should not refuse to play with redheads, and 100% thought that he/she should not throw rocks (see Table 1). A Cochran's Q revealed that the differences between the moral and non-moral scenarios were statistically significant,  $Q(4) = 16.167$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , even after making a Bonferroni's correction ( $p = .01$ ). These results indicate that on average, children were less likely to accept divergence from moral norms.

After being asked whether or not the protagonist should engage in a particular behavior, the children were asked if it would be okay for the protagonist to make the opposite choice; for example after deciding that Joe should not wear only yellow shirts, the child was asked if it would be okay/not okay if he *did* decide to wear only yellow shirts (we refer to this as the forced response). Specifically, we evaluated the forced responses of the children that decided the protagonist *should not* engage in the norm being promoted. Results revealed that 33% of children maintained that it would not be okay to wear only yellow shirts, 100% maintained it would not be okay to throw rocks at other children, 56% maintained it would not be okay to read books upside down, 78% maintained it would not be okay to not play with redheads, and 67% maintained it would not be okay to pick nose/eat boogers (see Table 1). A Cochran's Q revealed that the differences of forced responses in moral

versus non-moral scenarios were statistically significant,  $Q(4) = 14.286, p = 0.006$ .

### Modesty (Phase 2)

Phase 2 evaluated children's understanding of modest behavior following moral and ability achievements. It was hypothesized that children would not exhibit a preference for modesty at this age and favor immodesty across contexts. For all achievements, children tended to affirm that the protagonist should be proud of his/her actions, as well as be praised. A Cochran's Q revealed that children's decision of whether or not the protagonist should be *praised* was not dependent on the nature of the scenario,  $Q(4,10) = 5.33, p = 0.255$ . Similarly, the nature of the scenario did not affect children's decisions regarding whether the protagonist should be *proud* of his/her actions,  $Q(4,10) = 4.0, p = 0.406$ . While children's responses to whether or not it would be okay to keep the achievement a *secret* were more variable, this variability did not appear to be due to differences in the moral relevance of the context,  $Q(4, 9) = 6.8, p = 0.147$ . Children endorsed "showing off" equally across contexts,  $Q(4,9) = 0.0, p = 1.0$ . Decisions of whether it would be okay to tell everyone about the achievement did not change as a function of moral/non-moral context,  $Q(4, 3) = 4.0, p = 0.406$ ., Figure 1 displays these results.

While both "showing off" and "telling everyone" about a behavior represent immodest responses, the former seems more immodest than that latter. And children responded to these questions differently. A Wilcoxon Z Signed-ranks test compared differences between children's responses to "should [the protagonist] show off" and "would be it okay to tell everyone" for each scenario. Results indicate that for *saving a kitty*, *building a castle*, and *winning a bicycle race*, children were more likely to oppose showing off, but approve of telling everyone. These results show an identical trend toward significance,  $Z = -1.732, p = 0.083$ . This suggests the beginning of an appreciation for modesty.

### Discussion

The current study sought to explore when young children (4-6) begin to understand two distinct dimensions of humility, as well as the interaction between humility and the moral domain. Children's understanding of both modest behavior and (appropriate) openness/tolerance was evaluated. As hypothesized, results indicate that children have not yet developed a preference for modesty, yet children have begun to understand when it is appropriate to be open and accepting of others values and when it is not. Further, children's sense of appropriate tolerance corresponded with the moral domain: behaviors that violated moral norms were

tolerated less than those that were merely abnormal/unusual.

### **Dimension of Modesty**

With respect to the first dimension of humility, the results of the current study found similar results to previous works that preschool children do not respond positively to modest behaviors (Fu & Chen, 2000). Although their study focused on an older age group, it is in accordance with the hypothesis that 4-6 year old children would not possess an understanding of modesty. Roughly half of our participants thought that bragging or showing off is “wrong,” but when asked if they should tell others what good they have done, they agreed that they should. This suggests at least the beginning of an understanding that it is more modest to tell than to show off or brag. This also supports the study done by Banerjee (2000) that young children are not able to understand the negative impact that behaving immodestly can have in a social environment. In addition, results support the notion that children are more likely to respond positively to immodest behaviors in general, but especially if social gain is perceived (Cameron, Lau, Fu, & Lee, 2012).

Interestingly, there appeared to be a distinction between children’s opinions of “showing off” versus “telling everyone” about an achievement. For saving a kitten, winning a bike race, and building a castle, children were more likely to oppose “showing off” but to approve of “telling everyone.” Since “showing off” and “telling everyone” both constitute immodest behavior, response differences suggest children have begun to attribute a negative connotation to “showing off” in some contexts. If children believe it is not okay to show off but okay to tell everyone, they may be endorsing a modesty norm without fully comprehending it.

As this trend was found in scenarios involving moral *and* ability achievements, this understanding does not appear to be connected to the moral domain. However, it is important to note that both scenarios involving non-moral achievements (i.e., winning a bike race and building a castle) fall into this trend, while this is not the case for the moral norms. Perhaps young children are able to differentiate between personal skill and moral achievements. Further research exploring modesty in moral and non-moral contexts may help clarify the possible relationship between morality and modesty.

### **Dimension of Tolerance**

The present study explored children’s sense of appropriate tolerance in moral and non-moral contexts. As hypothesized, the extent to which children were willing to tolerate a behavior depended on the nature of the norm being promoted. Con-

sistent with the research by Wright (2012), behavior that enforced morally relevant norms was not only preferred initially but also held more strongly, as children were less likely to tolerate divergence from those norms (i.e., the forced response was consistent with their spontaneous response). In these scenarios, children decided the protagonist should not participate in the group's behavior and maintained that it would not be okay if he/she did decide to participate.

By contrast, children's decision regarding whether the protagonist should/should not *wear yellow shirts* or *read books upside down* was less consistent in spontaneous responses and more flexible in the forced responses. When the norm promoted was non-moral, on average, children did not show an initial preference for the protagonist participating/not participating in the behavior. When asked if the *opposite* decision would be okay, children were more accepting of the alternative, displaying more tolerance (see Tables 1&2). Children appear to be more accepting of divergence from conventional norms, understanding such behaviors as matters of personal choice.

Notably, while 93% of the participants spontaneously insisted the protagonist *should not* pick his/her nose, their forced responses (i.e., "would be okay if he/she picked his/her nose?") displayed more variability, signifying tolerance. Children's initial response supports Graham, Haidt, & Nosek's (2009) theory that issues of purity/disgust are held within the moral domain. However, children were more willing to tolerate deviation from this purity norm than from an issue involving harm/care (e.g., throwing rocks at other children). This evidence further isolates moral relevance as a predictor of (in)tolerance, as children at this age are clearly able to tolerate divergence from a widely held belief.

This study supports the understanding that children are less willing to ignore differences between individuals when those differences involve a deviance of moral norms. Perhaps this is because children are not sensitized to the fact that different social structures have differing moral views and instead focus on the divergence itself. A potential way to explain why the divergence is more important in a moral context is because individuals believe that their morals are more truth-based, while conventional beliefs are influenced by opinion. In concordance with Wright (2012), one possible explanation could simply be based on children's strength of moral conviction. In the presence of individuals who have differing competence-based ideologies, one would not feel as conflicted to defend his- or herself. However, if presented with morally deviant information, it would cause a stronger sense of cognitive dissonance that would require a larger modification to his/her conviction.

tions, suggesting that these moral convictions are worth defending.

### **Limitations**

Potential limitations include the base number of participants that were able to participate in our study. We had only a ~50% success rate when recruiting through an early childhood education facility, and the results could have been more pronounced had we acquired more participants. Additionally, one of the morally-deviant behaviors of dimension 2 may have caused some confusion due to phrasing. This scenario involved the children at school “not playing with girls with red hair.” This phrasing created some confusion when asking the children the first question (what do you think Lucy should do?): if the child said, “no, don’t do it,” this technically meant the actor should not play with girls with red hair (i.e., do not exclude them). Alternatively, if the child said “yes, do it,” this meant that Lucy should not play with girls with red hair. In reality, children often replied that Lucy should “do it” but meant Lucy *should play* with red-haired girls. This phrasing continued to be problematic when asking the children, “*would it be okay for Lucy to refuse to not play with girls with red hair?*” or “*would it be okay if Lucy decided to not play with girls with red hair?*” In the current experiment, if the answers became unclear, the experimenter interacting with the child restated or rephrased the question in order to get a clear answer, and children’s justifications (i.e., why she should/should not adopt the norm) helped to further clarify their responses. Although children were still significantly less tolerant of this moral norm violation, the results for this scenario were not quite as strong as the other moral violation (throwing rocks at other children). It is possible that the difference between the two moral scenarios was due to this confusion, and stronger results could be obtained in the future by rephrasing the norm.

### **Conclusion**

The current study was able to establish a baseline age from which the development of humility can be studied. It appears that children as young as four have the ability to display tolerance, and understand when it is appropriate to be tolerant and when it is not. As an appropriate use of (in)tolerance is critical to building relationships and constructing moral identity, this development should be encouraged as early as possible.

While one dimension of humility appears to be developing at a young age, a modesty norm has not fully developed. As children did not consistently show a preference for modesty in any context, further research must be done in order to

explore how modesty interacts with the moral domain. Interestingly, the current study did find differences in responses for “showing off” and “telling everyone” about an achievement, so it is possible young children begin to endorse modesty norms in some contexts but not others. Further research should explore a wider variety of contexts in order to pinpoint the specific developmental stages of humility.

The study of moral humility is relatively new to the field of moral psychology and any information that this study yields will be new knowledge capable of providing new questions viable for research. Hopefully our addition to this topic will provide answers to real world problems such as when we as parents, teachers, and scientists start to show concern for the development of morality in children and provide a foundation for further research.

### Notes

“The Development of Children’s Understanding of Humility” is based on research conducted by Matthew Echols for his Bachelors Essay in Psychology and Lauren Finkbiner for an independent study in Psychology, both under the tutelage of Dr. Jennifer Wright.

Matthew Echols, from Ridgeland SC, is a 2013 College of Charleston graduate with a Bachelors of Science in Psychology and Bachelors of the Arts in Religious Studies. After graduating, Matthew worked on an external grant through the Templeton Foundation furthering the research into Developmental Humility. After the grant is completed, he plans to enroll in a graduate program in Developmental Psychology.

Lauren Finkbiner graduated cum laude in the spring of 2013 from the College of Charleston with a major in Psychology. She enjoys working with children and hopes to attend a Counseling PhD program in the fall of 2014.

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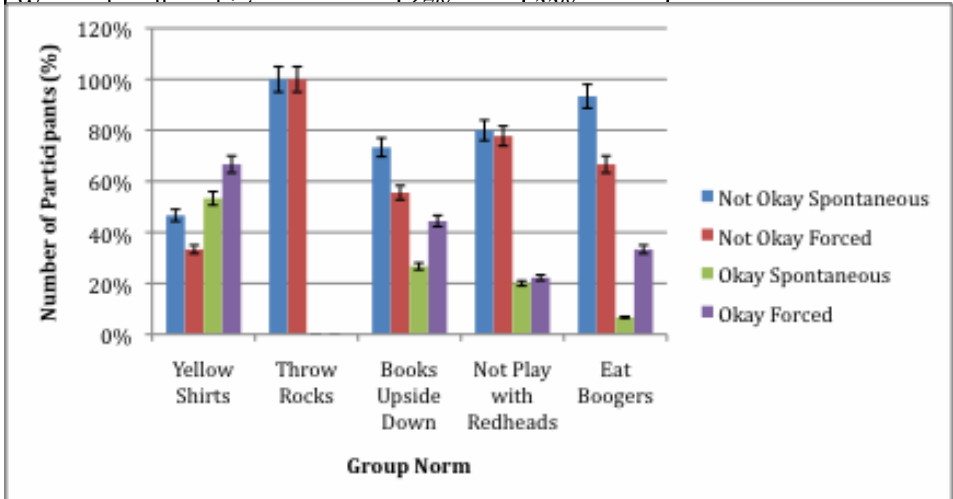
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Table 1: Spontaneous Responses

Group Norm	Yes (do it)	No (do not do it)
Wear only yellow shirts	53%	47%
Throw rocks at other children	0%	100%
Read books upside down	27%	73%
Do not play with redheaded children	20%	80%
Pick nose/eat boogers	7%	93%

Table 2: Forced Responses

Group Norm	Okay	Not okay
Wear only yellow shirts	67%	33%



## Appendix A

### Part 1: Phase 1 Script (Tolerance)

#### Conventional Norm: Wear Only Yellow Shirts (Joe and Kim)

Narrator: This is Joe (Joe walks into view)

Joe: Hello!

Narrator: Today is Joe's first day at a brand new school.

Joe: I'm really excited about starting school!

Narrator: At this school, all the other kids only like to wear yellow shirts. They want Joe to only wear yellow shirts just like them.

Kim: We only wear yellow shirts! You should only wear yellow shirts too!

Questions:

1. What is it that the other kids want Joe to do?
2. \*Puppet asks: What do you think I should do? Why do you think that?
  - a. *If yes he should:* what if Joe refused to wear only yellow shirts? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)
  - b. *If no he shouldn't:* What if Joe did wear only yellow shirts? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)

#### Conventional Norm: Read books upside down (Bobby & Max)

Narrator: This is Bobby

Bobby: Hello! I'm Bobby!

Narrator: Bobby is going to a new school today! It's his first day.

Bobby: I hope I make friends!

Narrator: At Bobby's new school, all the other kids like to read books upside down.

They want Bobby to read books upside down too!

Max: (reading book upside down) You should read books upside down from now on just like this!

Questions:

1. What is it that the other kids want Bobby to do?
2. \*Puppet asks: What do you think I should do? Why do you think that?
  - a. *If yes she should:* what if Bobby refused to read books upside down? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)
  - b. *If no she shouldn't:* What if Bobby did read books upside down? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)

**Conventional Norm: Pick their noses and eat it (Kim & Max)**

Narrator: This is Kim

Kim: I'm Kim!

Narrator: Its Kim's first day at a brand new school

Kim: I hope my teacher is nice!

Narrator: At Kim's new school, all the children like to pick their noses and eat the boogers.

Max: I just picked my nose! You should pick your nose and eat it too! Its fun!

Questions:

1. What is it that the other kids want Kim to do?
2. \*Puppet asks: What do you think I should do? Why do you think that?
  - a. *If yes she should:* what if Kim refused to pick her nose and eat it? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)
  - b. *If no she shouldn't:* What if Kim did pick her nose and eat it? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)

**Moral Norm: Throw Rocks at other children (Mark & Jane)**

Narrator: This is Jane

Mark: Hello!

Narrator: Today is Jane's first day at a brand new school

Mark: I can't wait for my new school!

Narrator: At this school, all the other kids like to throw rocks at other children.

They want Jane to throw rocks at other children too.

Jane: You should throw rocks at other children with us!

Questions:

1. What is it that the other kids want Mark to do?
2. \*Puppet asks: What do you think I should do? Why do you think that?
  - a. *What if Mark refused to to throw rocks at other children? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)*
  - b. *What if Mark did throw rocks at children? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)*

**Moral Norm: Not let any girls with red hair play with them (Lucy & Jane)**

Narrator: This is Lucy

Lucy: Hi, I'm Lucy!

Narrator: Today is Lucy's first day at a new school

Lucy: I can't wait to make new friends!

Narrator: At Lucy's school, the girls don't like to play with girls with red hair.

Jane: We don't like to play with red headed girls! You shouldn't play with any girl that has red hair!

Questions:

1. What is it that the other kids want Lucy to do?
2. \*Puppet asks: What do you think I should do? Why do you think that?
  - a. *If yes she should: what if Lucy refused to not let girls with red hair play with her? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)*
  - b. *If no she shouldn't: What if Lucy did not let any girls with red hair play with her? Would that be okay or not okay? (why)*

**Phase 2 Script: Modesty**

**A. Moral Achievements**

**Saving a Kitty (Bobby)**

Bobby loves outdoor recess. One day at school Bobby was playing outside and saw a kitty was drowning in a big puddle and he jumped in to save him. Bobby knew saving the kitty would get his nice new clothes all wet and dirty but

he jumped in anyway because he wanted to save the kitty. Afterwards, Bobby brought the kitty to the grown up to keep the kitty safe.

### **Helping a Little Kid (Jane)**

Jane's favorite time of day is indoor playtime. One day at school, Jane saw a big kid push a little kid down during playtime when the teacher wasn't looking!!! The big kid always took all the toys that the little kid wanted to play with. Jane began playing with the little kid during playtime every day to protect him from the mean big kid. The little kid did not know Jane was protecting him, but was happy to have a friend to play with.

### **Shares Lunch (Max w/ Kim)**

This is Max. Max's mommy makes yummy sandwiches for his lunch every day. One day Max was sitting at his lunch table. He was very hungry and couldn't wait to eat the special lunch his mommy packed for him. Max was about to eat when he noticed his friend Kim had forgotten her lunch that day. Max decided to share his lunch with Kim so she wouldn't be hungry.

## **B. Ability Achievements:**

### **Builds a castle (Joe)**

This is Joe. Joe loves to build with blocks. One day Joe worked very hard to build a castle at school. The castle was taller than Joe! Everyone said it was the biggest and best he had ever built!

### **Bike Riding (Lucy)**

Lucy rode her bike around her neighborhood all week to get ready for a bike race happening in her neighborhood. She rode her bike in the race so well that she won, because she was riding faster than anyone else!