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Young Authoritarians? Trends and Individual Differences in Preschoolers' Perceptions of Adult Authority

An Honors Paper for the Department of Psychology  
By Ava R. Alexander

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Adult Authority

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**Abstract**

Although traditional stage theories (e.g., Piaget, 1965) postulate that preschool age children are guided entirely by punishment avoidance and absolute deference to authority, more recent research suggests that their concepts of adult authority are complex and vary based on social cognitive domain and the content of the commands (e.g., Tisak, 1986). Also, although past studies have shown that the majority of children will reject adult authority in certain contexts, much individual variation between children has been observed (e.g., Laupa, 1994). The current study expanded upon past research by exposing children to multiple typical and atypical commands across domains, while also testing for individual differences based on two forms of parental authoritarianism. Results showed that children as young as four reject commands that go against established moral or conventional norms, and sometimes reject commands in the personal domain. This pattern grew stronger with age. High right-wing authoritarianism was a significant predictor of more authoritarian parenting style, and also predicted lower child support for authority in typical conventional scenarios.

Young Authoritarians? Trends and Individual Differences in Preschoolers' Perceptions of  
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The president of the United States has seemingly unchecked control over the country's nuclear arsenal, so much so that President Nixon once bragged that he could bring about the death of millions with a single phone call (Graff, 2017). If this call were to be made, the responsibility would fall on nuclear key operators to unquestioningly carry out said orders. This plan, designed as a deterrent to enemy powers during the Cold War (Graff, 2017), left one major question: what happens if the order is given by a president who is not mentally stable or sane? This was the question that Harold Herring asked in 1973, during his training to be a nuclear key operator, resulting in his unceremonious release from duty (Rosenwald, 2017). In Herring's eyes, if the order from the president were unjust or insane, it would no longer be a legitimate order, and it would be his responsibility to disobey. The government disagreed. In order to be a key operator, Herring needed to provide absolute obedience, without the possibility of rebellion. But how many people would actually provide such unquestioning obedience?

The answer, it seems, is many. Power, especially when made salient through formalized structures, as in the military, can be quite persuasive, and real-life incidences of crimes of obedience abound. For example, in March of 1968, Lt. William Calley ordered his platoon members to slaughter hundreds of Vietnamese civilians, and they obeyed. When brought to trial, Calley's main defense was that he himself had been following orders from a superior officer (Lindsay, 2012). Perhaps even more infamous are the Nuremberg Trials in the wake of World War II, in which prominent Nazi leaders defended their actions by claiming that they were just following orders (King, 2002).

Empirical evidence concerning the phenomenon of obedience comes from Stanley Milgram's (1963) famous experiments, in which participants, told to act as "teachers," delivered increasingly powerful – if simulated – shocks to a confederate "learner" in response to an experimenter's commands. Although Milgram went into the study with the goal of comparing American and German participants in order to isolate some quirk of the German psyche that would allow otherwise normal soldiers to follow the horrific directives of the Nazi leadership, what he found instead was that his American participants were willing to follow orders given by an authority even as they strayed increasingly from the realm of normal human behavior.

Although there are situations in which individuals may obey an authority figure purely out of fear of the adverse consequences of rebellion, obedience is often at least partially voluntary. When people choose to obey of their own accord, as in the Milgram paradigm, it is theorized that they must be driven by a sense of *legitimacy* (French & Raven, 1959). When an authority is viewed as legitimate, subordinates have a self-driven feeling of obligation to obey and defer (French & Raven, 1959). Although the sources of legitimacy may vary, there is evidence that people judge legitimacy using both utilitarian, outcome-based, and social, relationship-based criteria (Tyler, 1997). That is, subordinates may obey an authority because the authority knows best and obedience will produce the best outcome, or because they respect and admire the authority and want to please him or her.

Some studies distinguish between obligation to obey (OTO) and perceived legitimacy when studying authority (e.g., Darling, Cumsille, & Martínez, 2008), operationalizing legitimacy as a belief in authority's *right to command*, while OTO is the belief that a subordinate should or must follow said command. Others, however, have used them

interchangeably (e.g., Tyler, 1997). Because OTO is a natural result of perceived legitimacy, it is unsurprising that they are highly related constructs, and legitimacy is a strong predictor of OTO (Darling et al., 2008). Moreover, because perceived legitimacy concerns only the perception of an authority, whereas OTO taps subordinates' own relationship to said authority, they are often used concurrently to measure attitudes toward authority (e.g., Darling et al., 2008; Smetana, Wong, Ball, & Yau, 2014).

The clear OTO felt by Milgram's (1963) participants, then, also implies a high degree of perceived legitimacy in regard to the experimenter's authority. Third-party observers who have not directly experienced such a scenario, however, might be expected to be critical of the teacher's willingness to obey violent orders due to the actor-observer effect, in which people tend to attribute others' actions more to stable internal traits, and their own actions to external influences (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek, 1973). Consistent with this theory, Drout and Vander (1993) found that when participants who watched Milgram's filmed scenarios were asked to determine who would be responsible if the learner died from the electric shocks, they split the responsibility for the hypothetical death fairly equally between the experimenter and teacher/participant, determining that both were equally guilty. However, even these objective, uninvolved observers attributed less responsibility to the teacher when they were obeying an authority than they did when asked to imagine the teacher acting independently. In addition, those who only read about the scenarios without watching the film tended to rate the experimenter (authority figure) as significantly more responsible (Drout & Vander, 1993). Additionally, other studies have found that, even after watching the film, participants on average assign more responsibility to the experimenter (Blass, 1995). Even in the face of actor-observer bias, third parties view the

commands of an authority as a strong mitigating factor in a subordinate's guilt, making the subordinate less than fully responsible for his or her own actions.

This mitigation likely indicates that in the participants' eyes the experimenter's commands were legitimate, and that the teacher did have an obligation to obey, resulting in a lack of personal responsibility on the teacher's part – he was “just following orders.” In a similar pattern, Hamilton (1978) found that in a jury simulation of a trial for a crime of obedience in war, participants assigned more overall blame to the superior, even when many chose to convict the subordinate. This indicates that his power was legitimate. However, the authority's status seemed to affect his perceived legitimacy, as those who were told the orders came from a military captain assigned less relative blame to the subordinate than did those who were told the orders came from a lower-status sergeant (Hamilton, 1978). Overall, however, it does appear that even third-party observers are sensitive to the strong influence of a legitimate authority on a subordinate's behavior, even when that behavior breaches the bounds of socially acceptable and moral behavior.

### **Authority Legitimacy in Children**

The question of legitimacy has also been of great interest in a different context – that of child development. From as early as 17 months of age, children are highly attuned to social dominance. For example, they expect established power dynamics between two puppets to remain consistent and to dictate resource distributions, such that “dominant” puppet receive a greater share of a desirable reward than does its submissive counterpart (Enright, Gweon, & Sommerville, 2017). Logically, an attunement to dominance and authority seems useful in young children, as success during the first decade or two of life is



largely dependent on successful interactions with authorities in the form of parents and later teachers.

The majority of research on legitimacy and family dynamics has focused on adolescence, perhaps because the perceived legitimacy of parents as authorities tends to enter into a steady decline during these years (Darling et al., 2008). This decrease in legitimacy may lead adolescents to lose their internally-driven feelings of obligation to share personal information with their parents and to obey their commands (Darling et al., 2008; Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006), and has been linked to delinquent behavior (Trinkner, Cohn, Rebellon, & Gundy, 2012), making it an obvious candidate for study. However, far less is known about perceptions of legitimacy at the earlier end of childhood, when children may be less capable of functioning independently or distancing themselves from parental authority. Research into this area is important, as knowledge of young children's authority concepts can help to build healthy and safe power dynamics between children and their adult caregivers.

**Traditional stage theories.** Much of the literature on how both morality and authority concepts develop through early childhood is based in the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg, which view orientation toward authority as a product of ongoing cognitive development. According to Piaget (1965), before middle childhood, children exist in a state of heteronomy, in which adult authority is respected absolutely and serves as an external form of morality. This should result in preschoolers giving unlimited legitimacy to adult authority in most cases, regardless of the content of the command. Similarly, although Kohlberg's stages are not tied to chronological ages, his earliest stage of development is described in terms of punishment avoidance and belief in stable, authority-dictated rules

(Kohlberg, 1970, as cited in Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). In these early stages, children tend to say that children should obey adults “because they are grown ups” or because they are “bigger” (Dawson & Gabrielan, 2003, p. 203).

However, more recent literature has brought into question this simplistic view of children’s authority concepts. In fact, it appears that, by age seven, children’s criteria for legitimate authority are already relatively complex, taking into account knowledge and designated authority status in addition to age (Laupa, 1991). Even during the preschool years, children will choose to obey a peer who has been assigned an authority role (a “teacher’s helper,” Laupa, 1994, p. 6) over an unspecified adult (Laupa, 1994), indicating that, even for very young children, legitimate authority is not merely a product of physical dominance, but of status and expertise as well. Furthermore, preschoolers seem to distinguish authorities based on context, such that, although parents generally have more authority than any other figure (Yau, Smetana, & Metzger, 2008), teachers’ legitimate authority is magnified in schools, whereas parents have more legitimate authority in the home (Chen & Ispa, 1999). Although traditional stage theories are often still used as a general guide, it has become increasingly clear that children’s concepts of authority are more complex than those put forth by Piaget and Kohlberg. Nevertheless, the concept of moral reasoning as a feature that develops over time is still highly applicable.

**Domain theories.** Another important dimension on which children’s authority concepts vary in a manner that contradicts Piaget’s theories of heteronomy is Social Cognitive Domain. Social Cognitive Domain Theory traditionally divides social rules into the moral domain, encompassing rules that prevent harm or distress to others, and the social-conventional domain, which encompasses more arbitrary rules such as manners, customs,

and responsibilities (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983). An additional category, the personal domain, encompasses issues that pertain only to individual choice, such as preferences of food, activity, and friendship (Nucci, 1981). The ability to distinguish between these domains appears to develop sometime during the third year of life (Smetana & Braeges, 1990), preceding Piaget's heteronomous stage (1965).

The moral domain is the domain that children view as most enforceable by authorities (Tisak, 1986). Preschoolers and elementary schoolers across several cultures will state that parents are allowed to make rules preventing immoral actions, such as hitting (Tisak, 1986; Tisak, Crane-Ross, Tisak, & Maynard, 2000; Yau & Smetana, 2003). Although parents have the most complete and broadly extended control over the moral domain, teachers, too, are generally considered to have legitimate sway over enforcing moral rules (Yau, et al., 2008). All moral violations are generally considered to be more severe than violations in other categories (Smetana, Schlagman, & Adams, 1993), but the domain can also be further divided into three subtypes of violation: direct physical harm, psychological or emotional harm, and unfair behavior, which preschoolers perceive as descending in severity from the former to the latter (Smetana, Kelly, & Twentymen, 1984). In fact, some research indicates that events relating to fairness may be treated more similarly to social-conventional events by children 5 to 11 years of age, suggesting that there are times when the domains blur together (Weston & Turiel, 1980).

The social-conventional domain is also generally deemed by preschoolers to be within the legitimate purview of adult authority by children (Ardila-Rey & Killen, 2001; Yau & Smetana, 2003), though less so than the moral domain (Tisak et al., 2000). Perhaps because social-conventional rules are more arbitrary, children tend to deem violations of

these rules as less severe, and their wrongness as more dependent on the presence of explicit rules (Smetana et al., 1993; Weston & Turiel, 1980). Three-year-olds, for example, report that some conventional transgressions, such as not hanging up one's coat, would be perfectly alright if there were no rule forbidding them, though others, such as not participating in a classroom game, may not be (Smetana, 1981). This difference from the more unalterable moral rules might be reinforced by parent, teacher, and peer reactions to children's conventional transgressions, which tend to be less severe, less consistent, and less focused on emotional consequences than their responses to moral violations (Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Smetana, 1989).

Most studies have found that the personal domain, in contrast, is viewed as outside of adult control, though sizable percentages of children still endorse obedience to direct commands (Ardila-Rey & Killen, 2001; Tisak, 1986; Yau & Smetana, 2003). One study found that preschoolers in both the United States and China granted parents legitimate authority over the personal domain, particularly at younger ages; however, even those preschoolers who endorsed obedience to personal domain commands recognized that obedient children would be upset at being deprived of their individual choice (Smetana et al., 2014). Additionally, preschoolers judge violations of rules in this domain as less severe and less deserving of punishment than violations of moral rules (Tisak, 1993). This domain seems to have a good deal of individual variance in authority concepts, with one study showing that less than one in five 6-year-olds affirm parental legitimacy in the personal domain, as compared to around two-thirds in the social-conventional domain and almost all in the moral domain (Tisak, 1986). This could be due to a greater variety in parental modeling. Although Nucci and Weber (1995) found that almost all parents explicitly

presented the personal domain as contingent on preschooler's own choices during observation, and self-reported that they viewed some personal choices as up to their child, their sample was restricted to 20 white, middle-class, suburban children (Nucci & Weber, 1995). It is quite possible that this attitude of personal freedom is less prevalent in other types of communities, where parents might be more likely to emphasize obedience over choice.

Perhaps counterintuitively, although parental legitimacy is the strongest in the moral domain, preschoolers also view moral violations as more severe and less dependent on rules than violations in other domains (Smetana et al., 1993; Tisak et al., 2000). That is, even if a parent or other authority permits a moral violation to occur, children still tend to judge it as wrong. Based in Piagetian stage theories, the traditional concept of moral development is that a gradual internalization of parents' moral guidance and rules eventually lead to an independent conscience (Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim, & Eun Yoon, 2010), and indeed, parents tend to provide strong moral guidance during the early stages of development (Smetana, 1989). One explanation for children's understanding of morality as rule-independent, then, is that parental reinforcement causes moral rules to become more salient and unchangeable in children's minds, solidifying the importance of avoiding emotional and physical harm. However, despite the Piagetian theories of early amorality, there is an increasing body of evidence to suggest that young children may have an independent sense of morality from a very young age, which could cause children to reject moral violations even without parental guidance.

**Early Morality**

Contrary to Piaget's postulation that morality is entirely external until middle childhood, Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom (2010) have demonstrated that infants as young as 3 months of age prefer helping, prosocial characters to those who cause harm. During the second year of life, as motor skills and mobility develop, toddlers also voluntarily provide help to strangers in need even without direct verbal prompting (Dunfield, Kuhlmeier, O'Connell, & Kelley, 2011).

Although altruism is often assumed to be a purely human characteristic, Warneken and Tomasello (2006) have demonstrated that when tasks are sufficiently simple young chimpanzees will engage in similarly selfless helping behaviors, lending further credence to the idea of morality, or at least prosociality, as an innate tendency that develops even without human socialization. Furthermore, moral behaviors do not seem tied to outside motivation; toddlers show similar physiological arousal indicators when they provide help and when help is provided by a third party, indicating that the helping itself is more important than any extrinsic credit or praise (Hepach, Vaish, & Tomasello, 2012). All of this gives direct evidence against the heteronomous model of the young child put forth by Piaget (1965), and strongly suggests the existence of an early-emerging, and possibly innate, tendency toward prosociality and morality, which could explain the previously-mentioned rule independence and perceived severity of moral transgressions (e.g., Smetana et al., 1993).

**Moral Boundaries of Legitimate Authority**

Because parents and teachers are assumed to take on the role of moral guide, relatively little is known about what occurs when authority clashes with this existing moral framework. On the most basic level, we know that 5-year-olds will express disagreement

with a teacher or group of teachers who give an incorrect name for an object, or use ordinary objects for nontraditional purposes, such as drinking soup from a bottle (Guerrero, Cascado, Sausa, & Enesco, 2017). The perceived legitimacy of individual teachers' authority also increases with time spent in the classroom, indicating that children base legitimacy partially in earned trust (Chen & Ispa, 1999).

The evidence on whether preschool-age children directly use morality as a constraint on adult authority, however, is somewhat conflicted. As previously mentioned, preschoolers view moral transgressions as wrong independent of explicit rules (e.g., Smetana et al., 1993), but their opinions are less clear when confronted with an authority that directly endorses an immoral act. In a paradigm involving an unfair distribution of family chores, Piaget (1965) reported that 6-year-olds, who should be in the heteronomous stage, almost unanimously endorsed obedience over fairness, whereas older children favored fairness. However, a recent study involving Kuwaiti children aged 5 and 6 found that almost 88% endorsed fairness over obedience when using a similar vignette (Nazar & Kouzekanani, 2002). Although the authors suggest that these differences may be due to some aspect of early socialization specific to Kuwait, they are in line with other research showing that young children are capable of distinguishing between "good" and "bad" uses of authority, and delegitimizing the latter. For example, Tisak et al. (2000) found that preschoolers almost unanimously denied a mother's right to permit hitting in the home when it was prohibited at school. Similarly, Damon (1979) reported that almost all children aged 4 and over uniformly denied that their parent could order them to steal a necklace for them.

However, several other studies have found that, although a majority of children constrain their obedience endorsements based on morality, the results vary by age, and are

less than unanimous. Laupa and Turiel (1986), for example, asked children what the correct course of action would be if, upon witnessing a physical fight between two children, one person told them to stop fighting, while another ordered them to continue. The authority level of both figures was varied, ranging from peer nonauthority to adult authority. Elementary schoolers almost unanimously chose to obey the figure that commanded an end to the fight, even when a moral peer nonauthority was pitted against an immoral adult authority (Laupa & Turiel, 1986). However, when the same scenarios were put forth to preschoolers in a later study, the number that sided with the moral figure was only about two-thirds (Laupa, 1994). Similarly, Laupa and Turiel (1993) found that about one in five Kindergartners and first graders endorsed a school principal's legitimacy in allowing a group of children to physically fight, even when the event occurred outside of his jurisdictional zone (i.e., in a local park rather than in the school), whereas children in second through sixth grades unanimously rejected the command.

Despite their obvious refutation of Piaget's general timeline of morality, these results do give indications of a developmental trend. It appears that children become more conservative in their obedience to and respect for authority as they age, while their sensitivity to moral rules increases. This is somewhat in line with Piaget's theory (1965), which has young children gradually developing an ability to question the moral status of authority. However, due to the significant changes in environment that occur between Kindergarten and fourth grade (e.g., entrance into the formal school system), the shifts shown in these studies (e.g., Laupa & Turiel, 1993) may be due to direct socialization and explicit teachings rather than solely to qualitative changes in cognition. More convincing evidence might come from age differences within the preschool years, during which the external environment remains



fairly stable, but physical and mental development continues. Laupa (1994) found no significant age differences between 4 and 5-year-olds' responses to an aberrant command. However, this could be due to the relatively small sample size, and a limited study design that presented only one instance of atypical authority. Smetana et al. (1993) did find an age trend within the preschool years in regard to evaluations of moral transgressions, which revealed that their perceived rule-independence increased between ages 3 and 4, indicating a possible shift in moral reasoning, although the effect was restricted to females.

The heterogeneous nature of children's answers in the previously discussed studies is also worthy of further consideration. Particularly, the proportion of children in Laupa's (1994) study that chose to legitimize an immoral command is striking for several reasons. First, the transgressions ordered or allowed were unambiguously immoral. By the time they reach preschool age, children have almost doubtlessly been taught by multiple sources that physical fighting is wrong and should be avoided, so the willingness of some children to allow it based on an authority's command is significant. No justification was given for the immoral command, eliminating any possibility of moral haggling. Additionally, the presence of a conflicting commandant, even if that commandant is a nonauthority peer, should make the moral option (to stop fighting) highly salient, and should allow children to choose the moral option without having to think of it themselves or stand alone in their conviction. It is plausible that in less severe scenarios, or when another option was not explicitly presented, even more children would endorse obedience over morality. One goal of the current study is to replicate and extend the previously discussed findings by examining preschooler's reactions to more realistic scenarios involving the moral, social-conventional, and personal domains, including requests that violate established norms.

### **Individual Differences and Authoritarianism**

Because there appears to be some individual variability in preschoolers' judgments about immoral requests (Laupa, 1994), and even more in their acceptance or denial of parental authority in matters of personal choice (Tisak, 1986), it is plausible that some environmental factor might cause some children to have more Piagetian, heteronomous views of authority than others. Despite the wealth of research on the influence of parenting in other realms, to date no known studies have attempted to isolate any environmental factors that may lead to individual differences in authority orientation. However, based on research from other areas, right-wing authoritarianism represents a promising between-subjects factor.

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is a concept developed by Altemeyer (1981) as a revision of previous models of the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) that were developed in an attempt to explain fascist movements and tendencies. RWA is characterized by high conventionality and submission to authority, as well as by unquestioning acceptance of authorities' rules and aggression "against whomever these authorities target" (Altemeyer, 1998, p. 86). In adults, high RWA has been linked to ratings of the experimenter as more responsible, and the obedient teacher as less responsible, than controls after watching Milgram's *Obedience* films (Blass, 1995), indicating that the high RWA participants grant more legitimate authority to the figure commanding the electric shocks. Although adult obedience paradigms are generally interpreted through a normative, situation-based lens, both Milgram (Elms & Milgram, 1966) and later replications of the Milgram procedure (Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1995) have found links between authoritarian-type personalities and higher levels of obedience.

This may be explained in part by differing principles of morality. Some evidence shows that conservatism, which is closely related to RWA (Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, & Heled, 2010), dictates a categorically different set of moral values, deemphasizing harm avoidance and emphasizing obedience and loyalty (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). By that logic, those with more authoritarian personalities may have seen the Milgram paradigm as a conflict between two forms of morality, rather than between morality and obedience. That said, this paper will mainly discuss morality in terms of the more universal values of harm and fairness.

Although little is known about RWA's development through childhood, research has documented a high level of congruence among families. Adolescents with parents high in RWA are more likely to show authoritarian tendencies themselves (Duriez, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2008), and the transmission of RWA between generations has been used as an effective explanation for similarities between parents and children in racial prejudice (Duriez & Soenens, 2009). It might also be expected that, if authoritarian personality traits begin in childhood, they might affect the situations under which children grant legitimacy to their own authority figures.

Most of the literature on intergenerational transmission of RWA focuses on adolescents. However, there is some indication that signs of authoritarianism may be present even from a very young age. Reifen Tagar, Federico, Lyons, Ludeke, & Koenig (2014) used a social learning design to examine whether children of parents high in RWA show similar traits during the preschool years. In a paradigm often used to study normative trends in children's social learning (e.g., Koenig & Harris, 2005), unfamiliar adults introduced several common objects to preschoolers. The adults belonged to one of three categories.

Conventional adults gave the correct name for each object, unconventional adults gave an incorrect name (e.g., calling an apple a shoe), and a third group gave a mix of both. In the test trials, the adults introduced a novel object and gave it a name, and children were later asked if they believed the given label (i.e., “what do you think, is that a(n) X?” Reifen Tagar et al., p. 885). Children of high-RWA parents were more likely to trust labels given by conventional adults, and less likely to trust unconventional adults, than other children. When the adult was conventional only part of the time, however, children of RWA parents were more likely than other children to trust their naming of the new object, perhaps indicating a higher willingness to trust authorities based solely on their adult status when their reliability is unclear.

Notably, parents’ RWA in Reifen Tagar et al. (2014) was measured using a 4-item scale that asked exclusively about the characteristics they valued in children (e.g., “obedience’ versus ‘self reliance;” Reifen Tagar et al., 2014, p. 886). This scale was developed by Feldman and Stenner (1997) as a way to avoid confusion between authoritarian tendencies and authoritarian outcomes. Authoritarianism is considered a predictor of prejudice and other harmful attitudes, but the traditional, 30-item RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1998) contains questions that directly tap attitudes on issues such as homosexuality and feminism, leading to some amount of confusion between authoritarianism and simple prejudice.

However, because their 4-item scale asked directly about parenting attitudes, it is possible that parenting, rather than RWA per say, is the factor that relates to children’s differential trust of adult authorities. It seems unlikely, however, that these two factors operate entirely independently. It seems plausible that parents’ RWA would influence their

approach to parenting, and it is possible that parenting style may even play a mediating role between parents' RWA and offspring's developing RWA. Supporting this idea, Danso, Hunsberger, and Pratt (1997) found that young adults high in RWA endorse parenting practices that emphasize discipline and unilateral control. A study of parents and college-age offspring also found that high parental RWA was a strong predictor of highly authoritarian parenting styles, as reported by both offspring and parents (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997).

Authoritarian parenting, which bears obvious similarities to trait RWA, is a categorization developed by Baumrind to describe parenting that is highly controlling and invasive but lacking in warmth, and is generally associated with poor child outcomes (Baumrind, 1966, 1971). Children of authoritarian parents tend to perceive their parents' authority as less legitimate during adolescence than children of non-authoritarian parents (Trinkner et al., 2012). However, it is quite plausible that these practices could have the opposite effect during early childhood, when parents exert a much stronger influence over the daily lives and activities of their offspring and independent self-concepts are still underdeveloped.

No studies to the author's knowledge have directly explored the effect of authoritarian parenting style on children's reasoning about morality in reference to authority. However preschoolers who have experienced parental abuse are less likely to report an adult transgression to another authority (Lyon, Ahern, Malloy, & Quas, 2010), indicating that harsh treatment from parents may indeed make children less willing to question their authority. Extrapolating from this pattern, and from evidence for intergenerational transmission of authoritarian attitudes, it is possible that authoritarian parenting, which may

be more common in parents high in RWA, causes young children to view authority as more absolute due to its punitive and non-discursive nature (Baumrind, 1966). Additionally, children whose mothers use non-authoritarian styles have been shown to exhibit higher levels of prosocial reasoning and moral judgment (Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983). In a sample of Chinese elementary school students, authoritarian parenting was also correlated with low effortful control (Zhou, Eisenberg, Wang, & Reiser, 2004), and high effortful control has been related to an early understanding of moral rules as stable across contexts (Smetana et al., 2012). This raises the possibility that, in some scenarios, authoritarian parenting may lead children to choose authority over morality not only because they view authority as unilateral, but perhaps also due to a limited capacity for moral reasoning. In sum, it may be expected that the children who endorse obedience and legitimacy in contexts where other children do not, such as in the personal domain and in immoral situations, are showing the early influences of authoritarian parents.

However, there is also some support for the opposite hypothesis. Because most parents have likely emphasized the importance of moral behavior and conventional behavior, any hypothetical command that goes against these rules may be overshadowed in children's minds by their own parents' authority. In this case, authoritarian parenting could cause existing moral and conventional rules to seem more unbending and constant, and unable to be overruled by a secondary or hypothetical authority. Indeed, preschoolers with mothers who use harsher discipline techniques judge moral transgressions to be more severe and punishable than do others (Ball, Smetana, Sturge-Apple, & Suor, 2017). Furthermore, because children of parents high in RWA emphasize conventionality so highly in their judgments of authorities (Reifen Tagar et al., 2014), it is possible that a command that goes

against generally accepted norms or rules would cause these children of authoritarians to reject the command even more strongly. It is unclear, however, whether this rejection of the unconventional might also extend to the personal domain.

Based on this line of thought, authoritarian preschoolers should have a higher respect for conventional authority, but not for unconventional authority. In other words, these children might show a greater willingness to accept adult authority across domains when the commands are relatively typical (e.g., not fighting, eating with a fork), but show a noted rejection of unusual commands (e.g., fighting, eating with hands). Although this is somewhat contradicted by the findings on adult authoritarian's reactions to the obedience paradigms (Blass, 1995; Elms & Milgram, 1969; Meeus & Raajmakers, 1995), it should be noted that participants in Milgram's (1963) studies were led to believe that their actions were helping the greater good of science, another established norm, which might have helped to overrule their misgivings towards the unconventional commands.

### **Current study**

The purpose of the current study was fourfold. The first purpose was to replicate and extend past research on preschoolers' normative judgments of parental authority across moral, social-conventional, and personal domains, as well as the boundaries of said authority based on the content of the parental directive. This was accomplished by presenting preschoolers with hypothetical situations in which parents command their children to perform various actions, and asking them to report their support for the parent's authority through one question tapping the parent's legitimacy, and one tapping the child's OTO. In half of the moral and social-conventional vignettes, the commands were "typical," that is, aimed at stopping or preventing a violation of moral or conventional rules, and in the other

half they were “atypical,” or aimed at producing a violation. Because the personal domain is, by nature, specific to the individual and not subject to universal guidelines, all personal scenarios presented a command by a parent that contradicts a child’s personal preference. Framing authority in terms of specific commands, rather than rules that allow transgressions (e.g., Laupa & Turiel, 1993; Tisak et al., 2000) should result in an increased the salience of authority, more closely mimicking the situation of adults in the Milgram studies (1963). Unlike the few past studies that have explored child reactions to aberrant commands (e.g., Laupa, 1994), this study presented multiple scenarios across domains and typicalities. In order to more fully test children’s response to immoral commands, moral scenarios that do not involve direct physical harm (e.g., not sharing or calling names) were also included, allowing for a more comprehensive picture of children’s moral boundaries. Commands that violated social-conventional rules also allowed for the comparison of children’s reactions to violations across domains.

Based on past research, it was hypothesized that preschoolers would give more support (i.e., attribute more legitimate authority to the parent and report more OTO on the part of the child) when presented with moral requests than when presented with social-conventional requests, and the least when presented with personal requests. However, in the moral domain it was predicted that the granting of legitimate authority would not extend to immoral commands. When the command from a parental authority figure was immoral, it was predicted that the majority of children would reject the legitimacy of the order and endorse disobedience. In contrast, based on past studies showing the rule-dependence of the conventional domain (e.g., Smetana, 1981), the majority of children were expected to report



that parents can legitimately command a violation of social-conventional rules, and that the children should obey.

The second purpose was to test the lasting relevance of Piaget's (1965) stage-based theories in which complete respect for authority develops into autonomous moral reasoning over time. This was accomplished by testing for developmental differences in authority orientation between the ages of four and five. Although previous studies (Laupa, 1994; Laupa & Turiel, 1986) have indicated age-based differences in children's responses to deviant commands, no known studies have found age-based differences within the preschool years. However, due to the inclusion of multiple instances of aberrant commands across two domains, this study was expected to exhibit increased sensitivity to subtle age differences. Although, due to evidence of early moral development (e.g., Hamlin et al., 2010), evidence of specific Piagetian stages was not expected to emerge (and in fact Piaget would predict absolute compliance across both ages), it was hypothesized that older children would be more willing to reject parental authority. However, this was expected to be true only for atypical commands, in which a single authority goes against established norms. No age differences were predicted for answers to typical or personal domain commands, where the level of moral development should be largely irrelevant.

The third purpose was to attempt a replication of past research indicating that adult right-wing authoritarianism is related to strict, authoritarian parenting styles. This was accomplished by asking parents to complete questionnaires tapping both RWA and authoritarian parenting. Based on past research by Peterson et al. (1997) and Danso et al. (1997), it was predicted that parents with higher self-reported levels of RWA would also score higher on measures of authoritarian parenting practices.

The fourth and most novel purpose of the current study was to test for possible environmental factors underlying individual differences in young children's orientations toward authority. To the best of the author's knowledge, no previous studies have examined how environmental factors might affect children's responses to legitimacy questions. This study examined parental RWA and authoritarian parenting style as possible factors affecting children's perceptions of authorities' legitimacy across domains. It also tested the effect on perceived legitimacy when the authority's commands are atypical, and conflict with established moral or social-conventional rules. It was hypothesized that parents who are high in RWA should have children who give greater support to parental commands across all three domains, though there is a strong predicted possibility of a ceiling effect in the moral domain, for which most children were expected to endorse rules that follow moral norms. Additionally, based on adult findings that RWA is associated with a greater acceptance of authority in a Milgram paradigm (e.g., Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1995), it was expected that young children whose parents are high in RWA would be more likely to support immoral and unconventional requests from a parent than would other children.

It was also expected that authoritarian parenting techniques would show a similar relationship, such that children of authoritarian-style parents would give more support to commands across domains and assign children in the vignettes more OTO, including when the command was immoral or unconventional. Additionally, because high-RWA parents were expected to use more authoritarian parenting techniques, this study tested a possible mediational model, in which the relationship between RWA and children's authority concepts is mediated by parenting style.

However, an alternative and contrasting hypothesis was also tested. Due to the conformity and conventionality component of authoritarianism, children of RWA and authoritarian-style parents may be more highly attuned to established rules and norms. The alternative hypothesis predicted that children of authoritarian and high-RWA parents would be more likely to accept typical and personal commands, but would show a stronger rejection of unconventional and immoral requests than other children due to these commands' deviant nature.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 65 preschoolers of ages 4 and 5, recruited from 15 local preschools and childcare centers in midcoast Maine. Study information was sent home with children, along with informed consent forms, a demographic survey, and a brief questionnaire for parents to complete. Parents provided consent by returning the completed forms with their children on or before the day of testing. No monetary compensation was provided. A total of eight children were excluded from analyses due to developmental disabilities ( $n = 2$ ) or failure of parents to complete all forms ( $n = 2$ ), or because they were out sick or failed to provide assent ( $n = 4$ ), resulting in a final sample of 57. The participating children ranged in age between 44 months and 70 months of age ( $M = 57$ ,  $SD = 5.81$ ). For purposes of analysis, participants were split into a group of 4-year-olds ( $n = 27$ ) and a group of 5-year-olds ( $n = 30$ ). Child participants were largely female (63.2%), white (93%), and upper middle class (54%). Parent forms were completed by either mothers (78.9%), or fathers (21.1%).

## Materials

**Demographics.** Demographic information was collected using a short, optional survey that asked parents to report their child's age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as their own relationship to the child (i.e., mother, father, or other guardian), and their family's annual income.

**Right-Wing Authoritarianism.** RWA was assessed using a short form of Altemeyer's (1998) RWA scale, developed by Smith, Hanley, and McWilliams (2011) for the Evaluations of Government and Society Study (EGSS) and shown to have good predictive power for political affiliation, but not containing items explicitly tapping views on political issues such as homosexuality and feminism (Smith et al., 2011). Parents rated their agreement with five statements on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Statements include "there is no 'ONE right way' to live life; everybody has to create their own way," and reverse-scored items such as "our country needs free thinkers who will have the courage to defy traditional ways, even if this upsets many people." After reversing the scores for the reverse-scored items, the responses were be averaged to create a single score for RWA. Potential scores ranged from 1 to 7, such that a higher score indicated a higher degree of right-wing authoritarianism. Cronbach's alpha indicated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .79$ ). See Appendix A for scale.

**Authoritarian parenting practices.** Authoritarian parenting was assessed using the authoritarian subscale of Buri's (1991) Parental Authority Questionnaire, designed to distinguish between Baumrind's three parenting styles. Parents rated their agreement with ten statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Because the original questionnaire was designed as a child-report measure and thus featured third-person language, it was adapted

for this study so that all statements referred to parenting practices in the first person. Revised statements included, “I get very upset if my child tries to disagree with me,” “I let my child know what behavior I expect of him/her, and if he/she doesn’t meet those expectations, I punish him/her,” and “I have always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don’t do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.” Responses to all 10 questions were averaged to create a single score for authoritarian parenting, with potential scores ranging from 1 to 5, such that a higher score reflects a more authoritarian parenting style. Cronbach’s alpha indicated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .88$ ). See Appendix A for scale.

**Authority domain scenarios.** The authority domain scenarios consisted of 15 vignettes adapted from those used in the previous literature (Ardila-Rey & Killen, 2001; Smetana et al., 1993; Yau & Smetana, 2003). These were divided into three personal scenarios, six social-conventional scenarios, and six moral scenarios. In the moral and conventional domains, half of the commands given were typical, while half were atypical (violating established moral or conventional norms).

**Moral domain.** Children were presented with a total of six moral scenarios. In each scenario, a parent issues a command regarding a moral act. Acts are divided into three categories: physical harm (hitting or fighting), psychological harm (name-calling or laughing and pointing), or unfairness (failure to share cookies or toys). Half of these scenarios involved a typical command (a mother telling the child to stop or abstain from an immoral action), while the other half involved an atypical command (to engage in an immoral action). The typicality was counterbalanced so that, although all children heard one typical and one atypical command in each moral subcategory, the actions commanded alternated between the

two options. For example, some children heard stories about a mother commanding that her child stop fighting, and another mother commanding that her child hit another child, while others heard stories about a mother commanding that her child stop hitting, and another mother commanding that her child not fight with another child. See Appendix B for all scenarios and counterbalance orders.

***Conventional domain.*** Children were presented with a total of six conventional scenarios. In each scenario, a parent issues a command regarding a conventional act. Acts concerned utensils (eating with hands vs. spoon, and drinking from a cup vs. bowl), location of eating/drinking (standing vs. sitting on a chair while drinking milk, and sitting on the floor vs. in a chair while eating), and location of objects (putting shoes by the door vs. on the table, and putting toys in the kitchen vs. in the toy box). Half of these scenarios involved a typical command (a mother telling the child to perform the act in a conventional way), while the other half involved an atypical command (to perform the act in an unconventional way). The typicality was counterbalanced so that, although all children heard one typical and one atypical command in each conventional subcategory, the actions commanded alternated between the two options. For example, some children heard stories about a mother commanding that her child eat with a fork, and another mother commanding that her child drink from a bowl, while others heard stories about a mother commanding that her child eat with his or her hands, and another mother commanding that her child drink from a cup. See Appendix B for all scenarios and counterbalance orders.

***Personal domain.*** Children were presented with a total of three personal domain scenarios. Because commands in the personal domain are inherently arbitrary, typicality was

not a factor in this domain. The three scenarios involved food choice, playmate choice, and activity choice. See Appendix B for all scenarios and counterbalance orders.

**Interview questions.** The interview questions were meant to assess support for adult authority, and were based on past studies by Smetana et al., (2014). They tapped two aspects of support for authority: children's perceptions of adult *legitimacy* and children's OTO in each scenario. The legitimacy question asked, "is it alright or not alright for [child's] mother to tell him/her that he/she has to [action requested]?" (e.g., "is it alright or not alright for Johnny's mother to tell a Johnny to stop hitting?"). The OTO question asked, "should [the child] do it?" If children seemed unsure or confused, a prompt was delivered in the form of "should [the child] [action requested] like his/her mother says?" Responses were coded as 0 if the child said no or "not alright," 1 if the child said yes or "alright." In the few cases where a child persistently answered "maybe" or said he or she was unsure, a .5 was entered.

### **Procedure**

RWA and parenting style questionnaires, presented together as a single sheet, were sent home with parents approximately a week before the day of testing, along with two copies of an informed consent form, a flyer with a brief description of the study, and an optional demographic form in which they can report the child's exact age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as the family's socioeconomic status (see Appendix A for RWA and parenting scales). The completed forms were sent back to the preschool in a provided envelope and held by the childcare providers until the day of testing, when they were collected by the experimenters. Those children with completed forms were then pulled aside one by one to a quiet corner of the classroom or private room when available, where the interviews were conducted.

Each child first engaged in a brief warm-up activity with a female experimenter in which they played with a small interactive toy or read a book together. Following the warm-up, children were given an age-appropriate explanation of the study and asked for their assent to participate. Those who gave assent were then presented with one of two sets of scenarios in a fixed, pseudo-randomized order, with scenarios from each category interspersed throughout. Each list contained six moral, six conventional, and three personal scenarios. The two question sets were created to ensure the equivalency of moral and conventional scenarios in the typical and atypical categories. As previously explained, the typical and atypical moral and conventional scenarios were switched across the two sets, so that stories in which parents commanded a moral or conventional action in the first set became the scenarios in which the opposite command was given in the second (see Appendix for both sets of scenarios). The names of the children in the scenarios were matched to the gender of the participant, and drawn from a list of common names. If the child shared a name with one of the children in the scenarios, an alternative name was substituted for that child.

After each scenario was presented, children were first asked the *legitimacy* question. After they answered the legitimacy question, they were asked the *OTO* question. As soon as an answer was given for both questions, the experimenter said “okay!” in an upbeat tone, and proceeded to the next scenario. When all scenarios were completed, the participant was thanked and allowed to return to the classroom, where they were encouraged to immediately engage in another activity so as to minimize talk about the study amongst the children. All eligible children were later given a small prize toy regardless of participation.



## Results

Parent RWA scores ranged from 1.0 to 6.8 ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ), and authoritarian parenting style scores ranged from 1.0 to 4.1 ( $M = 2.39$ ,  $SD = .72$ ). A preliminary one sample binomial test<sup>1</sup> revealed that children provided affirmative (authority supporting) answers at a rate greater than would be predicted to occur by chance for all typical conventional questions ( $p < .05$ ). Children also answered affirmatively above chance for all typical moral questions ( $p < .05$ ), with the exception of the legitimacy question for scenario 14, which involved the avoidance of psychological harm (see Appendix B), for which children performed at chance ( $p = .063$ ). Children gave affirmative answers at a rate below what would be expected by chance for all atypical moral and atypical conventional questions ( $p < .05$ ). In the personal domain, children answered affirmatively at rates above chance for OTO in the food choice scenario ( $p < .05$ ), and below chance for legitimacy in the friendship choice scenario ( $p = .006$ ). All other personal scenario questions were answered at ratios similar to chance ( $p > .05$ ; see Appendix B for all scenarios).

In preparation for further analyses, answers for both legitimacy and OTO questions were summed across the three questions for each category (personal, typical moral, atypical moral, typical conventional, and atypical conventional), resulting in 10 separate scores for each child. Scores ranged from 0 to 3, with each score representing the total number of affirmative (supportive of authority) responses given in that category.

In order to obtain the fullest information, analyses were organized in two distinct ways. In the first set of analyses, each scenario type (i.e., personal, typical moral, atypical moral, typical conventional, and atypical conventional) was treated as a unique category, and

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the binomial test, “maybe” answers (coded .5) were not included. These were replaced and included for the remaining statistical analyses.

all scenario types were compared individually. This allowed for the examination of the personal domain in conjunction with the other two domains. In the second set of analyses, personal domain items were removed, and the remaining categories were analyzed by domain and typicality in order to assess the competing influences of these two factors.

For the first set of analyses, a preliminary ANOVA found a main effect of gender,  $F(1, 53) = 3.11$ ,  $MS_e = 2.53$ ,  $p = .048$ , such that male participants gave significantly more support to authority ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) than did females ( $M = 1.37$ ,  $SE = .08$ ). However, because no interactions involving gender reached significance, data was collapsed across gender for the subsequent analysis.

A 5 (scenario type) x 2 (question type) x 2 (age group) mixed-measures ANOVA was then conducted, with scenario type and question type as within-subjects factors, and age group as a between subjects factor. As predicted, results revealed a significant main effect of scenario type,  $F(3.14, 172.59) = 116.31$ ,  $MS_e = 1.13$ ,  $p < .001$ .<sup>2</sup> Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that personal domain commands drew significantly less support than did typical commands in either the moral or conventional domains. However, personal commands drew significantly more support than did atypical commands in the moral ( $M = .42$ ,  $SE = .09$ ) or conventional domains. Typical commands in both domains both garnered significantly more support than did atypical commands in both domains ( $p < .001$  for all effects; see Figure 1). However, contrary to predictions, there was no significant difference between atypical conventional and atypical moral, or between typical conventional and

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<sup>2</sup> Because assumptions of sphericity were not met for scenario type or the interaction between scenario type and question type, Greenhouse-Geisser values were used for these effects.

typical moral commands, indicating that typicality might be the driving force behind these differences.

The ANOVA also revealed a significant main effect of question type,  $F(1, 55) = 15.12$ ,  $MS_e = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that children across conditions were more likely to endorse a child's obligation to obey a command ( $M = 1.54$ ,  $SE = .07$ ) than they were to endorse a parent's legitimate right to issue said command ( $M = 1.41$ ,  $SE = .07$ ).

There was also a significant interaction between question type and scenario type,  $F(3.53, 193.94) = 4.05$ ,  $MS_e = .17$ ,  $p = .003$ . A follow-up Tukey test indicated that children tended to say that a child should obey a command more often than they said that a parent could legitimately issue a command only in the typical moral scenarios ( $HSD = .209$ ). There was no distinction between OTO and legitimacy in the personal domain, or in the atypical moral, typical conventional, or atypical conventional categories (see Figure 2).

There was no significant main effect of age group. However, there was a significant interaction between scenario type and age group,  $F(4, 220) = 3.044$ ,  $MS_e = .164$ ,  $p = .028$ . A follow-up Tukey test revealed that 5-year-olds were less supportive of authority than 4-year-olds only in the personal, atypical moral, and atypical conventional scenarios ( $HSD = .288$ ; see Figure 3). No other effects reached significance.

In order to further explore the effects of typicality and domain on children's answers, personal domain scenarios were dropped, and another ANOVA was run with domain and typicality as separate variables. As in previous analyses, a preliminary ANOVA revealed a main effect of gender,  $F(1, 53) = 5.229$ ,  $MS_e = 1.866$ ,  $p = .026$ , such that males gave significantly more support to authority ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) than did females ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SE$

= .08). Because gender did not interact significantly with any other variables, it was removed from subsequent analyses.

A 2 (domain) x 2 (typicality) x 2 (question type) x 2 (age group) mixed-measures ANOVA was then conducted for the moral and conventional domain commands, with domain, typicality, and question type as within-subjects factors, and age group as a between-subjects factor. Results confirmed and elaborated on the effects of the previous analyses.

There was no main effect of domain; however, there was a main effect of typicality,  $F(1, 55) = 273.842$ ,  $MS_e = 1.493$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that children gave less support to commands that went against established moral or conventional norms ( $M = .511$ ,  $SE = .09$ ) than to commands that were in line with established norms ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SE = .09$ ).

There was also a significant main effect of question type,  $F(1, 55) = 14.560$ ,  $MS_e = .122$ ,  $p < .001$ . Children were more likely to state that a command had to be obeyed ( $M = 1.52$ ,  $SE = .07$ ) than they were to accept a parent's legitimate right to issue a ( $M = 1.40$ ,  $SE = .07$ ).

There was a significant interaction between question type and domain,  $F(1, 55) = 7.704$ ,  $MS_e = .143$ ,  $p = .008$ . A follow-up Tukey test indicated that in the moral domain, but not in the conventional domain, children gave less positive responses to the question of whether it was "alright" for an adult to issue a command than to the question of whether the child should obey the given command. Moral legitimacy scores were also lower than either OTO scores or legitimacy scores in the conventional domain ( $HSD = .190$ ; see Figure 4).

A second two-way interaction emerged between question type and typicality,  $F(1, 55) = 7.062$ ,  $MS_e = .114$ ,  $p = .010$ . A follow-up Tukey test revealed that in the typical scenarios,

but not in the atypical scenarios, children were less likely to say a command was legitimate than that it had to be obeyed ( $HSD = .169$ , see Figure 5).

There was a marginally significant main effect of age group,  $F(1, 55) = 1.984$ ,  $MS_e = 2.040$ ,  $p = .077$ , such that 5-year-olds tended to show less support for authority ( $M = 1.37$ ,  $SE = .09$ ) than did 4-year-olds ( $M = 1.55$ ,  $SE = .10$ ). There was also a significant interaction between age group and typicality,  $F(1, 55) = 6.820$ ,  $MS_e = 1.493$ ,  $p = .010$ . A follow-up Tukey test revealed that, although both 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds gave significantly more support to typical than atypical commands, the effect was significantly stronger for 5-year-olds ( $HSD = .614$ ; see Figure 6).

Next, in order to test our hypotheses regarding the relationship between parental variables and individual child responses, as well as between the two parental variables themselves, bivariate Pearson's correlations were computed between the ten discrete question scores and the two parenting scores. In line with hypothesized patterns, parents high in RWA also tended to endorse an authoritarian style of parenting,  $r(55) = .32$ ,  $p = .016$ . This indicates that RWA explained 10.37% of the variance in parental authoritarianism.

Contrary to hypotheses, only one category of child answer was found to be significantly correlated with parental variables. There was a significant, negative correlation between judgments of legitimacy in the conventional, typical scenarios,  $r(55) = -.28$ ,  $p = .038$ , such that children with parents high in RWA were more likely to deny the legitimacy of commands to follow conventional rules (e.g., eating with a fork).

In examining the correlations between question categories, several patterns were possible. If children were entirely consistent in their judgments regardless of the characteristics of the scenario (e.g., if they were perseverating to a high degree), all scores

should be highly correlated. However, scores might also group by question type, such that all OTO scores are correlated with all other OTO scores, around domain, or around typicality.

Correlations revealed that scores grouped by typicality, with legitimacy and OTO judgments in the atypical conventional scenarios significantly correlating with all legitimacy and OTO judgments in the atypical moral scenarios, but not significantly correlating with judgments in the typical moral and typical conventional scenarios. Typical scores in both domains were also consistently and significantly correlated, suggesting that judgments of typical and atypical commands may operate independently. Judgments of legitimacy in the personal domain were correlated significantly at the .01 level only with judgments of legitimacy and OTO in the atypical scenarios. Although some significant correlations emerged between personal legitimacy judgments and typical legitimacy and OTO judgments at the .05 level, they were less consistent indicating that children's judgments of authority in the personal domain are more consistently related to their judgments of atypical, "violating" commands than to their judgments of normal commands (see Table 1 for  $r$  values). In order to test whether these patterns were a product of previously observed age differences, age was factored out using regression. The observed patterns remained unaltered.

## **Discussion**

### **Normative results**

These results replicated several important patterns from past literature. From as young as four, children showed a strong distinction between the personal domain and other domains. Personal domain commands were viewed as less legitimate and less binding than typical commands in the moral or conventional domains, though still more legitimate and binding than atypical commands. Children also showed a distinct consensus that commands

that go against established moral and conventional rules are not legitimate and do not need to be followed, whereas those that are in line with norms are legitimate and should be followed. This is striking for several reasons. Traditional stage theories (e.g., Piaget, 1965) have long postulated that young children are strongly oriented towards authority, such that the possibility of reward and punishment should overpower other considerations. These patterns give direct evidence that preschoolers are capable of weighing authority against other considerations such as harm to others, personal freedom, and social conventions.

Although legitimacy and OTO were highly correlated within categories, our results showed that, for typical moral commands (e.g., sharing, not hitting, or not calling names), children may believe that commands should be obeyed despite their lack of legitimacy. That is, even if a child believes a command to be “not alright,” once issued the command must be obeyed.

This pattern is unexpected, as children have been shown to attribute a high degree of legitimacy in the moral domain (Tisak, 1986). One explanation is that broader societal guidelines and accumulated lessons make the question of what the child “should” do less dependent on the individual authority of the parent, particularly when commands are in line with moral standards. That is, children might believe that a child “should” share, based on general moral knowledge, even if they do not think that the mother has the right to command sharing.

Another explanation is that children may have been confused by the legitimacy question, which asked whether it was “alright or not alright” for the mother to command an action. Two out of three of the typical moral scenarios began with a child engaging in an immoral action and the mother commanding a stop or reversal of said action. Some children

may have responded to this immoral action, rather than to the actual command, when answering the evaluative question. This is supported by the pattern of responses for scenario 14, for which children answered affirmatively only at chance rates, possibly indicating some level of confusion. However, it is unclear why this effect should be restricted to the moral domain.

One effect that was not replicated by this study was the distinction between moral and conventional domains. Contrary to hypotheses and to previous literature showing that young children make a clear distinction between moral and conventional domains (e.g., Smetana & Braeges, 1990; Tisak et al., 2000), no main effect of domain was found between moral and conventional scenarios, and only one significant interaction involving domain occurred. Conventional commands were not seen as less legitimate or binding, nor were they considered more acceptable when they conflicted with established norms. In fact, there was a strong consensus that both moral and conventional commands that went against norms were unacceptable and should not be followed, contradicting previous findings that children consider conventional violations acceptable if no rule preventing them is present (Smetana, 1981).

Although explanations for children's answers were not requested, about half of the children tested did volunteer their reasoning for at least one question. Among these children, several focused on the possible consequences of conventional decisions. For example, some mentioned that putting shoes on the table could cause the table to become dirty, or standing up on top of a chair could result in the child falling or spilling milk. This reasoning could indicate that some conventional scenarios are not viewed by preschoolers as arbitrary, but rather as important and consequence-based, which could have resulted in their being treated



more like moral scenarios. It is also important to note that children were not asked to directly compare conventional and personal scenarios, and gave categorical answers. For these reasons, it is also possible that our measures were simply not sensitive enough to pick up subtle differences between judgments of the two domains.

Another important factor to note is the distinction between commands and rules. Our study explored children's responses to specific, one-time commands from a single authority, whereas others who have found distinctions between moral and conventional domains have often utilized the concept of sweeping, stable "rules" (e.g., Smetana 1981) which permanently allow or forbid an act. Children may have viewed commands in our scenarios as going against the rules rather than altering them, resulting in less willingness to stray from convention.

However, as previously mentioned, children did make strong distinctions between the personal domain and other domains. These results replicated past literature showing that the personal domain is generally viewed by preschoolers as less legitimately controlled by parents than other domains (Ardila-Rey & Killen, 2001; Tisak, 1986; Yau & Smetana, 2003). Unlike previous studies, however, children did not approach unanimity in their decisions to reject personal domain authority. In fact, children's answers were evenly split for the majority of personal domain questions. This may be due to the design of the study, which used several personal domain scenarios interspersed with typical and atypical scenarios from other domains, perhaps leading children to evaluate the personal commands in a more realistic and less consistent way than if all personal scenarios had been presented together as a block. Children also responded differently to different questions in the personal domain, indicating that this domain might best be subdivided into more specific categories. For

example, food choice seems to be considered a more legitimate sphere of adult authority than does friendship choice. Overall, the failure to fully accept parental authority in the personal domain adds to the growing body of evidence that children place boundaries on parental authority from a young age.

### **Gender Effects**

Due to similar studies' failure to find significant gender differences in judgments of authority (e.g., Ardila-Rey & Killen, 2001; Smetana, 1981; Smetana et al., 2014), there were no specific hypotheses regarding gender. However, a main effect of gender did emerge in both sets of analyses. Specifically, males were shown to generally assert more support for authority. This is surprising considering past literature. Although men and women in the United States tend to score about equally on measures of trait authoritarianism (Brandt & Henry, 2012), adult women score consistently higher than males on agreeableness (Weisberg, DeYoung, & Hirsch, 2011), and Kochanska, Coy, and Murray (2001) found that, between 14 and 45 months of age, female children are more likely to enthusiastically comply with mother's prohibitive commands (i.e., commands to stop an activity) than were male children. As the majority of the commands in this study were to some degree prohibitive, it might have been expected that girls would have endorsed legitimacy and OTO at higher rates than boys. However, some evidence from school-age children indicates that parents may use harsher discipline techniques with boys (McKee et al., 2007). This could potentially cause a greater orientation toward authority over other concerns in boys, particularly in hypothetical situations in which the emotional investment of the child is minimal.

It should also be noted that our sample of boys was smaller and somewhat self-selecting, as more boys than girls failed to provide assent. This may have affected the overall

gender trends within our small sample, as boys who were more resistant to authority may simply have refused to participate. Additionally, the overall gender imbalance in our sample suggests the possibility that parents of boys may have anticipated more resistance on the part of their child, and therefore have been less willing to enroll them in the study. Males have also been shown to be higher in activity level and distractibility than girls during early childhood (Schoen & Nagle, 1994). Because the first three scenarios featured “typical” commands, children who are more distractible may have been more prone to perseveration, resulting in the overall yes bias for boys found in this study. Future studies should focus on further exploring these possible gender differences.

### **Age Differences**

One aim of this study was to combine the stage-based theories of Piaget and Kohlberg with more modern, domain and morality based theories. As such, developmental differences between 4 and 5-year-olds were of great interest, and after analyses several trends did reach significance. Specifically, children seem to grow less accepting of authority as they age, but only in situations involving personal choice, commands that cause harm, or commands that go against convention. This is somewhat in line with Piaget’s (1965) basic concept that children begin in a state of complete deference to authority, and eventually learn to constrain authority with moral and other factors. However, even 4-year-olds made a clear distinction between legitimate and illegitimate commands based on typicality and domain, showing that, even at a young age, children use their knowledge of societal rules to constrain their judgments of authority.

Still, the fact that this ability grows with age lends some credence to the idea that there may be some early starting point at which children view adult authority as absolute,

though it is clearly earlier than postulated by Piaget. Future studies should find creative ways to test younger children in order to find this starting point. Puppet shows and eye gaze trackers have been used to demonstrate infants understanding of morality (e.g., Hamlin et al., 2010) and dominance (Enright et al., 2017); similar methods might be used to track very young children's perceptions of characters who do or do not follow orders in various circumstances. In addition, older children should also be tested in order to get a full picture of the developmental trajectory. It might be expected that, as children reach late childhood, they would reject atypical moral commands almost unanimously. However, since age might also bring a greater understanding of the arbitrariness of social-conventional rules, it is possible that rejection of atypical conventional commands would decline. In fact, Tisak et al. (2000) found that third graders, as compared to first graders and preschoolers, were more likely to say that an authority could legitimately permit moral and particularly conventional violations to occur, indicating that age effects might not be fully linear.

It is worth noting that the decline in perceived legitimacy and OTO in the personal domain was not predicted, and is not clearly related to Piagetian improvements in moral reasoning. This is consistent with some past evidence that belief in children's power to make their own decisions grows over the preschool years (Yau & Smetana, 2003), but other studies have failed to find meaningful age differences in the personal domain (Smetana et al., 2014). This decrease in perceived legitimacy and OTO seems to speak to a growing understanding of individual choice as an inherent right, perhaps due to the increase in independence granted with each passing year of childhood. In this domain particularly, however, the ultimate trend is unclear. It is possible that the developmental endpoint is a complete rejection of authority in the personal domain, but this seems unlikely given that studies of adolescent-parent dyads

have found that belief in parents' personal domain legitimacy varies as a product of parental technique (Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Future studies should attempt to clarify developmental arcs. The personal domain will be discussed further in the proceeding section.

### **Parenting Variables and Individual Differences**

This study also replicated past findings indicating that parents high in RWA also endorse authoritarian parenting styles (Danson et al., 1997; Peterson et al., 1997). This was the first study to the author's knowledge to examine self-reports of RWA and parenting style concurrently in parents of young children. Although the relationship between authoritarian parenting and RWA is fairly intuitive, its emergence at such an early stage of parenthood gives strong confirmation for the effect. This relationship may give insight into how RWA is transmitted between generations. There is strong evidence that children of parents high in RWA tend to endorse higher levels of RWA themselves (e.g., Duriez et al., 2008). However, relatively little is known about the transmission process. There is fairly strong evidence for a genetic component, as evidenced by studies of RWA in twins separated at birth (McCourt, Bouchart, Lykken, & Keyes, 1999). Although this study did not find strong evidence of transmitted authoritarianism in preschoolers, the correlation between RWA and authoritarian parenting style strongly suggests that RWA shapes the familial environment in a meaningful way, which may give some contribution to the development of RWA at a later date.

The main focus of this study was on finding influencing factors that might underlie individual differences in children's judgments of authority. In contrast to hypotheses, only one significant correlation emerged between child responses and parent variables. A significant correlation was found between child legitimacy judgments of typical, conventional scenarios and parental RWA. However, the correlation was in the opposite

direction as our hypotheses predicted, such that children of parents higher in RWA were more likely to deny the legitimacy of commands that align with conventional rules, such as eating with a fork or putting toys in the toy box. Due to the large number of correlations computed and the relatively weak strength of the observed correlation, this relationship should be interpreted cautiously.

This counterintuitive result could indicate that young children behave reactively to parent attitudes. Although no relationship was found between this factor and authoritarian parenting style, it is possible that these high-RWA parents were also high in other aspects of power assertion not tapped by the parental authoritarianism survey. Older children have been shown to reduce their legitimacy beliefs in response to highly assertive parenting (Trinkner et al., 2012). This study gives some evidence that younger children may do the same, strengthening previous literature showing that parenting high in power assertion may reduce behavioral compliance in young children (e.g., Kochanska, 1991).

Another explanation for this effect comes from the work of Zhou et al. (2004). They found that children of authoritarian parents showed lower levels of effortful control. Although the correlation here was with RWA and not parental authoritarianism, the two are correlated and it is possible that they have similar effects. A lack of effortful control may have impacted children's answers due to the structure of the scenarios. As previously mentioned, most scenarios described a child engaging in an action, and a parent commanding a different or opposite action. Specifically, all of the typical conventional scenarios described a child engaging in an unconventional action (e.g., eating with his or her hands), and a parent commanding a conventional action. Children often reacted with shock or amusement to the unconventional actions, and sometimes seemed unable to inhibit the

impulse to declare these actions “not alright,” despite the fact that they had been asked to evaluate the parent’s command rather than the child’s actions. This could have resulted in children with low inhibitory or effortful control answering “not alright” to typical conventional scenarios at a higher rate than other children. This issue was less salient for the OTO questions, for which a prompt describing the command was given when children seemed confused or hesitant. However, it is unclear why this pattern did not also emerge in the moral domain.

Based on this limited study, RWA and parental authoritarianism do not appear to be driving factors behind individual differences in children’s authority judgments. Nevertheless, the patterns of children’s answers do still indicate a degree of individual difference. Children were significantly less likely to support authority in the personal domain than for typical questions in any other domain. In fact, children’s responses to a majority of personal domain questions were at chance, indicating an even split between those who supported authority and those who denied it. However, the consistent correlations between personal domain items and atypical items indicates that, rather than being confused, children may have been showing distinct, differentiated patterns of response. That is, children’s tendency to support authority in the personal domain was predictive of responses to items in other categories, indicating that their answers were not merely chance-based. The relative independence between atypical and typical conditions also suggests that children are not merely perseverating – that is, they were not answering “yes” or “no” to all questions regardless of content.

Future studies should further attempt to isolate trait or environmental factors that may underlie individual differences in responses. In order to do so, it may be helpful to focus specifically on the personal domain, where responses were most evenly distributed.

Responses to personal items were correlated with responses to atypical items, as well as with many typical items, so knowledge of when and why children accept adult authority in the personal domain could also shed light on their overall perceptions of authority, and their potential responses to real-world atypical commands.

One possibility is that children's orientation toward authority is the result of an interaction between parenting style and some temperamental variable. Past research has found that parenting styles affect child outcomes differentially depending on their temperamental characteristics. For example, Kochanska (1991) found that parenting styles that used more powerful discipline led to lower levels of independent conscience, but only in children who were temperamentally fearful and anxious. It is possible that a similar pattern applies to authority judgments, such that authoritarian parenting only leads to higher acceptance of authority for children of certain temperaments, perhaps those who are inhibited or have low levels of self-regulation.

Another possibility is that parents' explicit statements about personal choice guides children's judgments, especially in the personal domain. As previously mentioned, Nucci and Weber (1995) found that parents tend to make explicit statements about the primacy of individual freedom in the personal domain. In this study, children seemed to echo this sentiment with their own volunteered justifications, which often included assertions of personal freedom. Future studies should examine whether variations in parents' statements and guidance about personal domain activities accounts predicts child responses to personal domain commands.



### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study had many strengths, and represents the most comprehensive picture to date of children's responses to commands from adults across domains. Children judged multiple, varied scenarios in each domain and typicality category, resulting in a stronger and more sensitive measure than those used in past studies. Scenarios were also varied in content and severity in order to gain a broader understanding of each domain. Support for authority was also assessed through two complementary questions, allowing for a fuller understanding of children's legitimacy views.

However, there were also several limitations inherent to the design. The sample size was quite small, making the power to detect individual difference patterns fairly weak. The sample was also largely white and upper-middle class, making results difficult to generalize to the population at large. The ranges of RWA and authoritarian parenting scores were fairly limited, with most parents reporting low scores on both measures. This may have been due to the geographical area from which data was collected, which is fairly liberal, as well as to the self-selecting nature of the sample. Several potential participants expressed some discomfort with the questionnaires, and those who chose not to participate due to this discomfort may have scored higher on measures of authoritarianism. This restricted range again made it difficult to detect patterns of individual differences, and it is quite possible that significant correlations between parenting variables and child responses may have emerged in a more ideologically diverse sample.

Another limitation emerged through the structure of the moral scenarios, which created a potential confound. Due to the nature of moral rules, which are generally aimed at preventing harm, two out of three typical moral commands were preventative, or aimed at

stopping an action, whereas all atypical moral commands were proactive, or aimed at inciting an action. This could have led to children giving more support to typical commands not because they recognize the atypical commands as immoral, but simply because they are more willing to accept preventative commands. However, because no differences were found between the moral domain and the conventional domain, where all commands were proactive, it seems less likely that this confound affected the results in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, future studies should attempt to incorporate proactive typical moral commands (e.g., helping a friend) and preventative atypical moral commands (e.g., not helping).

Due to time and resource limitations, the experimenter also did not request explanations or justifications for child responses. Some children did volunteer responses, and these often included references to their own home rules, concern for the safety or feelings of others, or concern for adverse consequences. Future studies should collect explanations from all children in order to gain greater insight into the thought processes that underlie these judgments of legitimacy.

Another important limitation of the current study is the lack of explanation given for parents' commands in the vignettes. In real-life scenarios, adults giving an unconventional, immoral, or personal command would likely provide some type of explanation. For example, they might ask their child to sit on the floor because the table is being used for something else, to eat the vanilla cookies because they are healthier, or to hit another child because that child was bad. This has also been the case in adult studies, such as Milgram (1963), in which participants' actions were "justified" by the experimenter's insistence that the experiment was an important scientific venture. Those children who did volunteer explanations for their responses often indicated that they had inferred a reason for the commands (e.g., not standing

on the chair because the child might fall). However, the lack of explicit reasoning may have led to variation in children's interpretations of the commands. If these commands were explicitly justified, the task of distinguishing between authority and morality would become increasingly difficult, perhaps leading to more meaningful variation in children's responses.

In order to further explore this distinction, future studies might explore differences in children's responses to justified and unjustified commands. Although it is likely that children would be more willing to follow commands that are explained, it is also possible that some individual differences would arise. Specifically, because authoritarian parenting is characterized by a lack of discourse between parent and child regarding the parent's authority (Baumrind, 1966), it is possible that children of authoritarian parents would be more accustomed to, and therefore more willing to obey, commands that are issued without explanation.

This study also used hypothetical situations that were presented to the children as "made-up," and used randomly selected names. As previously discussed, there is good evidence that children's belief in adults' legitimate authority is based at least partially on perceived expertise (Laupa, 1994) and developed trust (Chen & Ispa, 1999). If the adult, authority status of the parents in each scenario was not sufficiently salient to children, it is likely that they would have fallen back on previous experiences with parents and teachers rather than legitimizing a hypothetical character. In fact, these results still leave some possibility of Piagetian heteronomy (Piaget, 1965), as children may have made decisions based solely on their knowledge of real, unchanging rules and accumulated authority. Indeed, all moral and social norms can to some degree be interpreted in this way – as the accumulated rules and commands of various authorities. This is less satisfying, however, in

the personal domain, where children exhibited reluctance to support authority even when commands referred to inconsequential actions and conflicted only with the character's personal desires.

Still, future studies might attempt to test whether preschoolers apply the same boundaries to the authority of real adults who they know and trust. Due to ethical considerations, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which this could be tested behaviorally. However, future studies might explore children's responses to hypothetical typical, atypical, and personal commands that are attributed to real authority figures.

It is also worth noting that the children in this study were asked to evaluate only the legitimacy of the specific command, as well as the obligation of the child to obey. No evaluation was requested of the actual authority in question. The question remains of whether and how children evaluate adults who give atypical commands, and whether they might permanently lose legitimacy in children's eyes, as did the unconventional adults in Reifen Tagar et al. (2014). Future studies might also examine how children distribute guilt between the authority and subordinate character, mimicking adult studies on perceptions of crimes of obedience (e.g., Blass, 1995; Drout & Vander, 1993; Hamilton, 1978). Fincham (1985) found that children as young as five view other children as less responsible for the results of their actions if they were following the commands of an adult, but no studies to the authors' knowledge have explored whether the displaced blame is shifted onto the adult authority, and in what proportion.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Overall, this study gives evidence that young children are capable of judging commands from an adult authority based on multiple competing factors, including typicality

and domain. Research into children's understanding of authority is important for many reasons. Obedience to and respect for authority is, in many cases, desirable. Understanding what types of commands are viewed as legitimate by young children may assist parents in their attempts to provide effective and understandable guidance to their offspring.

However, there are also cases in which obedience is not desirable. For example, 4-year-olds decreased ability to make distinctions between typical and atypical commands in comparison to older children may make them especially vulnerable to coercive or abusive commands from parents, and even to sexual abuse from adults within or outside of the family. Although some sexual abuse interventions have attempted to reduce general unquestioning acceptance of adult authority (e.g., Tutty, 1994), future interventions may want to focus on increasing children's ability to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate spheres of adult influence, perhaps between the personal domain and other domains.

More abstractly, this study gives insight into the early developmental origins of concepts and ideals that are taken for granted in the adult population. Particularly in the United States and other individualist countries, personal autonomy is often held as an almost sacred principle. However, as previously discussed, this sometimes comes into competition with the ideals of respect for authority and tradition, particularly in those with authoritarian-typed personalities, or entrenched in relatively authoritarian structures such as the military. This study shows that these conflicting influences come into effect early in life. Future research should continue to illuminate their evolution and origins.

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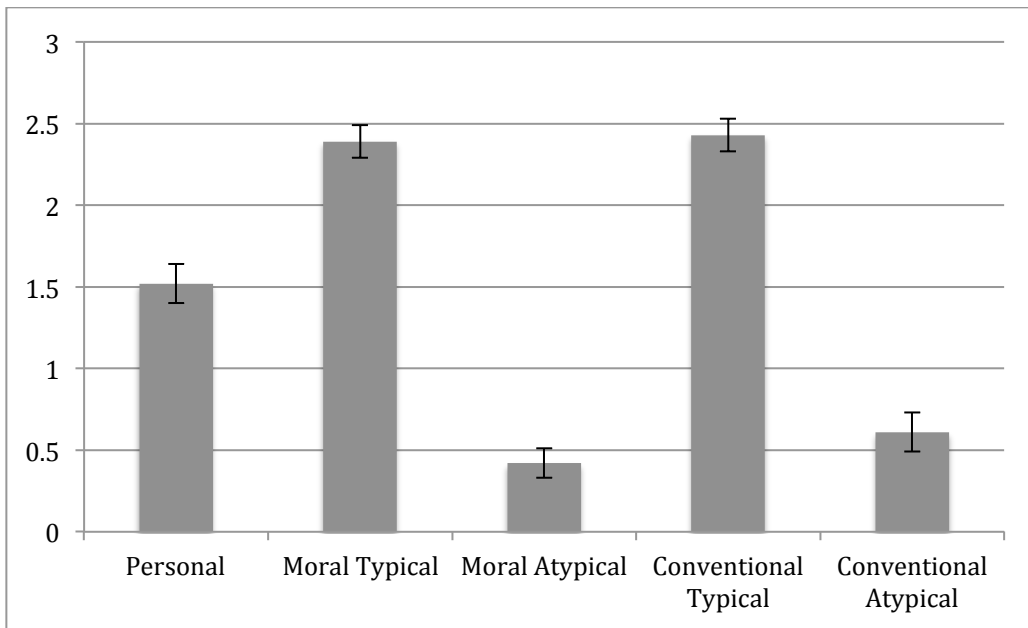


Table 1

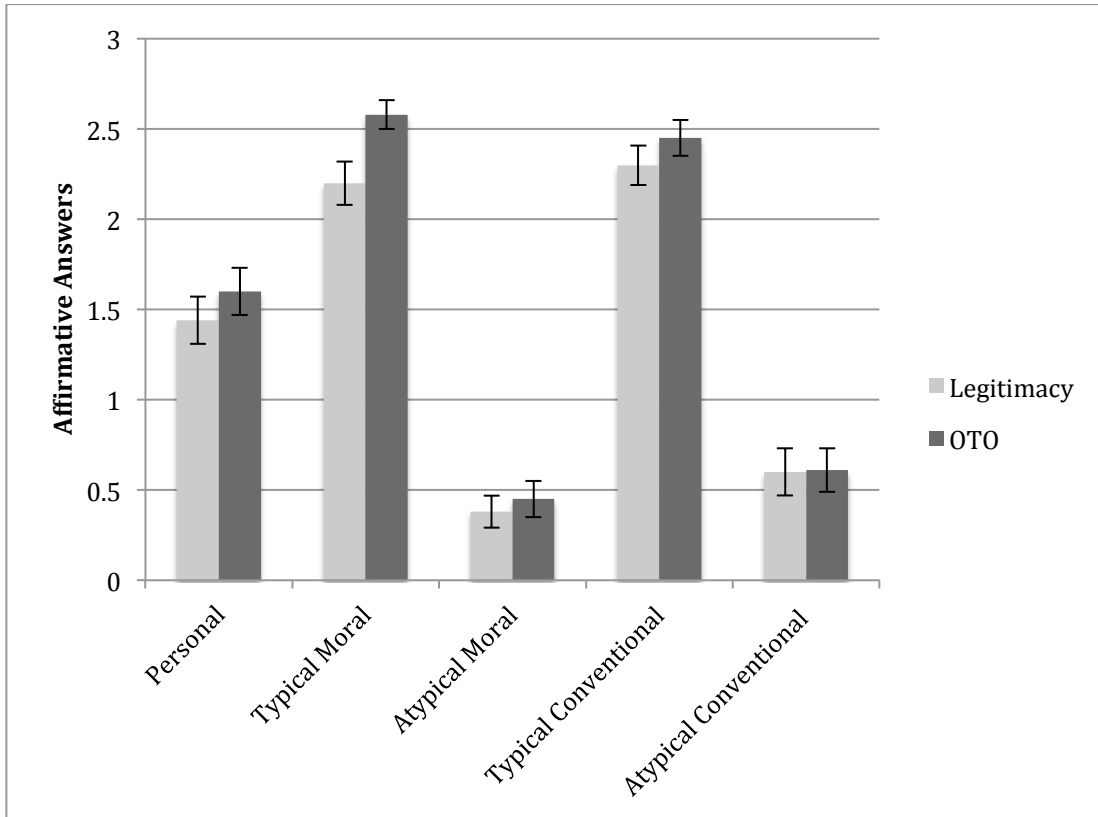
*Pearson's bivariate correlations between legitimacy and OTO scores for each scenario type*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Personal Legitimacy									
2. Personal OTO	<b>.77**</b>								
3. Typical Moral Legitimacy	.21	.10							
4. Typical Moral OTO	.31*	.16	<b>.75**</b>						
5. Atypical Moral Legitimacy	<b>.40**</b>	.27*	-.04	.12					
6. Atypical Moral OTO	<b>.45**</b>	<b>.37**</b>	-.00	.14	<b>.87**</b>				
7. Typical Conventional Legitimacy	.32*	.24	<b>.44**</b>	<b>.49**</b>	.11	.15			
8. Typical Conventional OTO	.22	.16	<b>.57**</b>	<b>.45**</b>	.02	.13	<b>.76**</b>		
9. Atypical Conventional Legitimacy	<b>.51**</b>	<b>.45**</b>	.02	.07	<b>.44**</b>	<b>.59**</b>	.21	.20	
10. Atypical Conventional OTO	<b>.44**</b>	<b>.41**</b>	-.06	-.01	<b>.47**</b>	<b>.64**</b>	.16	.12	<b>.83**</b>

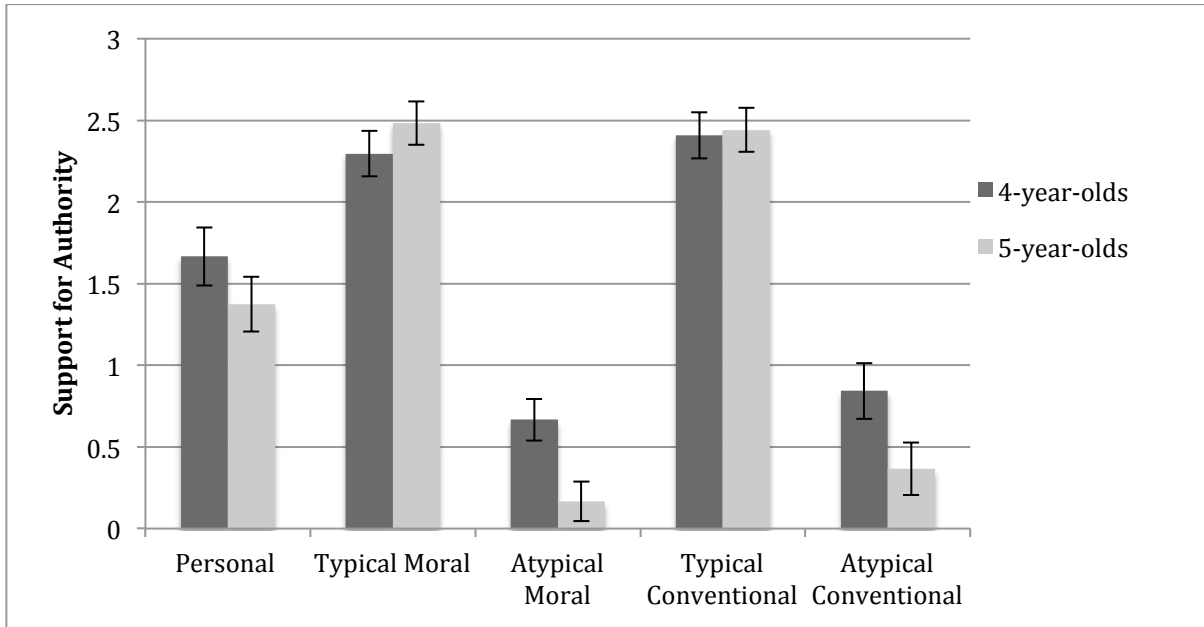
Note: Correlations marked with \* are significant at the .05 level. Those bolded and marked with \*\* are significant at the .01 level. For all correlations  $df = 55$ .



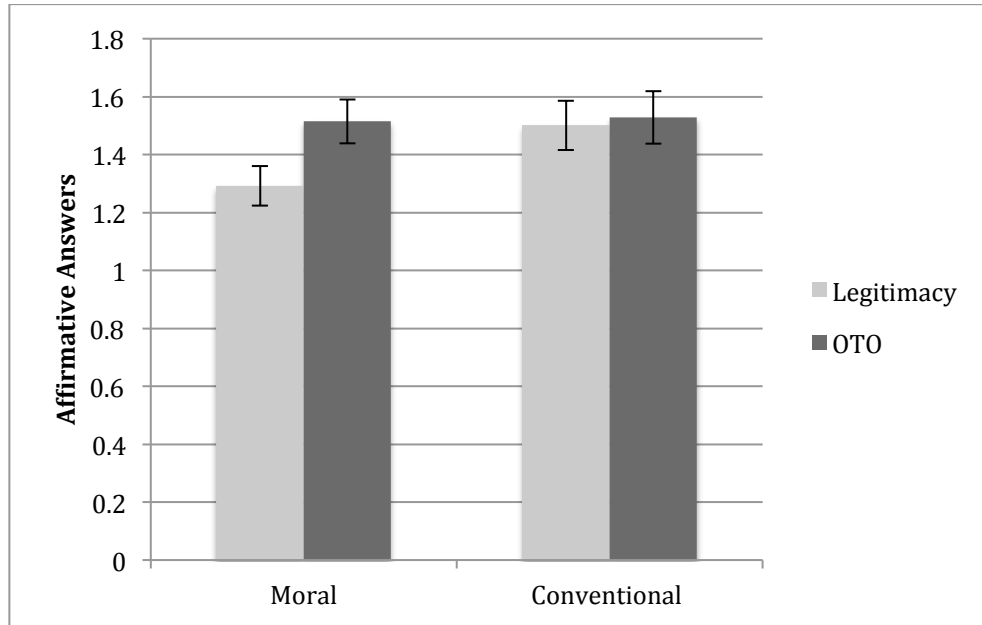
*Figure 1.* This figure illustrates the main effect of scenario type on support for authority. Bars represent the mean number of affirmative (supportive of authority) responses; error bars represent SE.



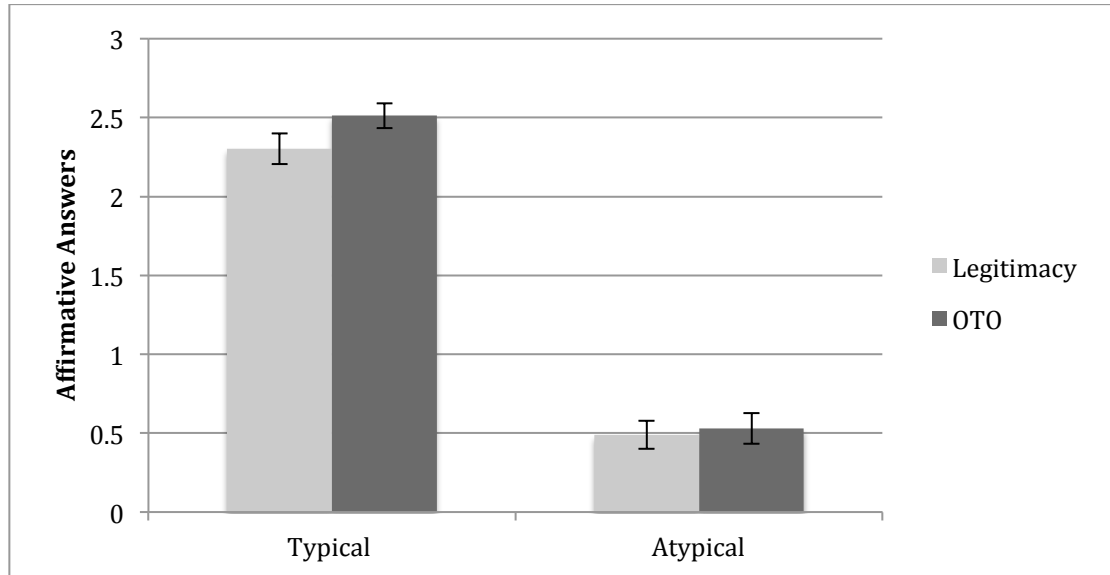
*Figure 2.* This figure illustrates the two-way interaction between question type and scenario type on support for authority. Bars represent the mean number of affirmative (supportive of authority) responses given, and error bars represent the standard error.



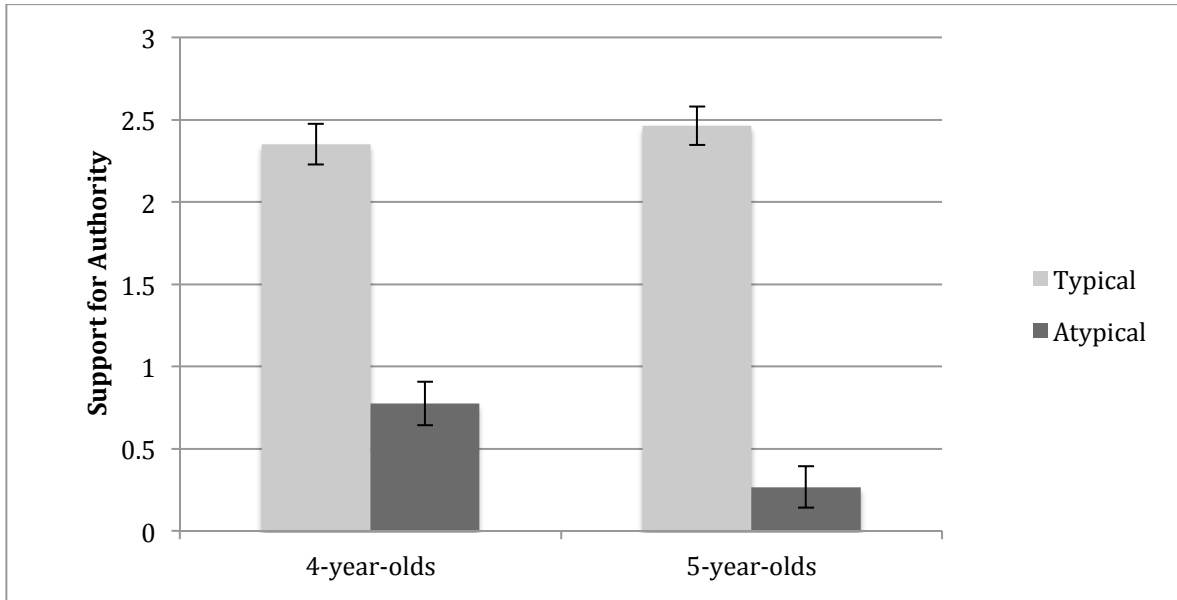
*Figure 3.* This figure illustrates the two-way interaction between age group and scenario type on support for authority. Bars represent the mean number of affirmative (supportive of authority) responses given, and error bars represent the standard error.



*Figure 4.* This figure shows the two-way interaction between domain and question type. Bars represent the mean number of affirmative (supportive of authority) responses given, and error bars represent the standard error.



*Figure 5.* This figure shows the two-way interaction between typicality and question type. Bars represent the mean number of affirmative (supportive of authority) responses given, and error bars represent the standard error.



*Figure 6.* This figure shows the two-way interaction between age group and typicality on children’s support for authority. Bars represent the mean number of affirmative (supportive of authority) answers given. Error bars represent standard error.

**Appendix A****RWA Questionnaire**

**Instructions:** For each of the following statements, circle the number of the point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) that best describes your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers, so don't spend a lot of time on any one.

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Somewhat disagree

3 = Slightly disagree

4 = Neither agree nor disagree

5 = Slightly agree

6 = Somewhat agree

7 = Strongly agree

1. There is no "ONE right way" to live life; everybody has to create their own way.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
2. Our country needs free thinkers who will have the courage to defy traditional ways, even if this upsets many people.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
3. Our country will be great if we honor the ways of our forefathers, do what the authorities tell us to do, and get rid of the "rotten apples" who are ruining everything.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
4. What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil and take us back to our true path.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
5. The "old-fashioned ways" and "old-fashioned values" still show the best way to life.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7



**Parental Authority Questionnaire**

**Instructions: For the remaining statements, circle the number of the 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) that best describes how that statement applies to you and your child. Again, there are no right or wrong answers, so don't spend a lot of time on any one item. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement.**

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

1. Even if my child doesn't agree with me, I feel that it was for his/her own good if he/she is forced to conform to what I think is right.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Whenever I tell my child to do something, I expect him/her to do it immediately without asking any questions.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I do not allow my child to question any decision I have made.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have always felt that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel that wise parents should teach their children early just who is boss in the family.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I get very upset if my child tries to disagree with me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I let my child know what behavior I expect of him/her, and if he/she doesn't meet those expectations, I punish him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I often tell my child exactly what I want him/her to do and how I expect him/her to do it.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My child knows what I expect of him/her in the family and I insist that he/she conform to those expectations simply out of respect for my authority.	1	2	3	4	5

**Appendix B****Vignettes**

After each vignette, children were asked two questions

1. Is it alright, or not alright for \_\_\_'s mother to tell him/her that he/she has to \_\_\_?
2. Should he/she do it?

If the child seems confused or hesitant about the second question, a prompt was given in the

form of: "should he/she \_\_\_\_\_ like his/her mother says?"

# CB1

Alternative names: Zach & Nicole

1 (Typical Conventional). One day, Noah/Emma starts to eat his/her spaghetti with his/her hands, but Noah's/Emma's mother tells him/her to eat with his/her fork.

2 (Typical Moral). One day, Connor/Abigail is hitting another child, but Connor's/Abigail's mother tells him/her to stop hitting

3 (Personal). One day, Patrick/Jane is choosing between two kinds of cookies. Patrick/Jane wants to eat the chocolate kind, but Patrick's/Jane's mother tells him/her to eat the vanilla kind.

4 (Atypical Moral). One day, Johnny/Anne sees another kid trip and fall over, and his/her mother tells him/her to laugh at the kid.

5 (Atypical Conventional). One day, Andrew/Ellie is eating his/her lunch sitting at the table, but Andrew's/Ellie's mother tells him/her to sit on the floor instead.

6 (Atypical Conventional). One day, Luke/Hannah starts to drink his/her juice out of a cup, but Luke's/Hannah's mother tells him/her to drink it from a bowl instead

7 (Typical Moral). One day, Evan/Grace is playing with some other kids and there is a big table with lots of toys. Evan/Grace takes all the toys from a table, but Evan's/Grace's mother tells him/her to put some toys back for the other kids.

8 (Personal). One day, Michael/Emily wants to have his/her friend Tommy/Lauren over to play, but Michael's/Emily's mother tells him/her to pick someone else to play with instead.

9 (Atypical Conventional). One day, Will/Sophie puts his/her toys away in the toy box, but Will's/Sophie's mother tells him/her to put them in the kitchen instead.

10 (Atypical Moral). One day, Matthew/Allison is having a snack with some other kids and there is a big table with lots of cookies. Matthew's/Allison's mother tells him/her to take all of the cookies and not leave any for the other children.

11 (Atypical Moral). One day, Cooper/Ashley is playing with a toy with another kid, and Cooper's/Ashley's mother tells him/her to fight with his/her friend over the toy.

12 (Personal). One day, Jacob/Isabella wants to draw a picture, but Jacob's/Isabella's mother tells him/her to play with blocks instead

13 (Typical Conventional). One day, Ethan/Olivia is drinking his/her milk standing up on top of a chair, but Ethan's/Olivia's mother tells him/her to sit down.

14 (Typical Moral). One day, Ben/Sarah sees a kid who he/she thinks looks funny, so he/she calls the kid a mean name and points at him/her, but Ben's/Sarah's mother tells him/her not to call names

15 (Typical Conventional). One day, Evan/Maddi puts his/her shoes on the table instead of by the door, but Evan's/Maddi's mother tells him/her to put them by the door.

# CB2

Alternative names: Zach & Nicole

1 (Typical Conventional). One day, Noah/Emma starts to drink his/her juice out of a bowl, but Noah's/Emma's mother tells him/her to drink it from a cup instead.

2 (Typical Moral). One day, Connor/Abigail starts fighting with his/her friend over a toy, but Connor's/Abigail's mother tells him/her to stop fighting with his/her friend.

3 (Personal). One day, Patrick/Jane is choosing between two kinds of cookies. Patrick/Jane wants to eat the chocolate kind, but Patrick's/Jane's mother tells him/her to eat the vanilla kind.

4 (Atypical Moral). One day, Johnny/Anne sees a kid who he/she thinks looks funny, and Johnny's/Anne's mother tells him/her to call the other child mean names and point at him.

5 (Atypical Conventional). One day, Andrew/Ellie is drinking his/her milk sitting down, but Andrew/Ellie's mother tells him/her to stand up on top of a chair and drink it there.

6 (Atypical Conventional). One day, Luke/Hannah starts to eat his/her spaghetti with his/her fork, but Luke's/Hannah's mother tells him/her to eat with his/her hands instead

7 (Typical Moral). One day, Evan/Grace is having a snack with some other children and there is a big table with lots of cookies. Evan/Grace takes all the cookies from the table, but Evan/Grace's mother tells him/her to put some cookies back for the other kids.

8 (Personal). One day, Michael/Emily wants to have his/her friend Tommy/Lauren over to play, but Michael's/Emily's mother tells him/her to pick someone else to play with instead.

9 (Atypical Conventional). One day, Will/Sophie puts his/her shoes by the door where they usually go, but Will's/Sophie's mother tells him/her to put them on top of the table instead

10 (Atypical Moral). One day, Matthew/Allison is playing with some other children and there is a big table with lots of toys. Matthew's/Allison's mother tells him/her to take all the toys from the table and not leave any for the other children.

11 (Atypical Moral). One day, Cooper/Ashley is playing with another kid, and Cooper's/Ashley's mother tells him/her to hit the other child

12 (Personal). One day, Jacob/Isabella wants to draw a picture, but Jacob's/Isabella's mother tells him/her to play with blocks instead.

13 (Typical Conventional). One day, Ethan/Olivia is eating his/her lunch sitting on the floor, but Ethan's/Olivia's mother tells him/her to sit at the table.

14 (Typical Moral). One day, Ben/Sarah sees another kid trip and fall over, so he/she laughs at the kid and calls him/her a mean name, but Ben's/Sarah's mother tells him/her not to laugh.

15 (Typical Conventional). One day, Evan/Maddi puts his/her toys away in the kitchen instead of in the toy box, but Evan's/Maddi's mother tells him/her to put them in the toy box