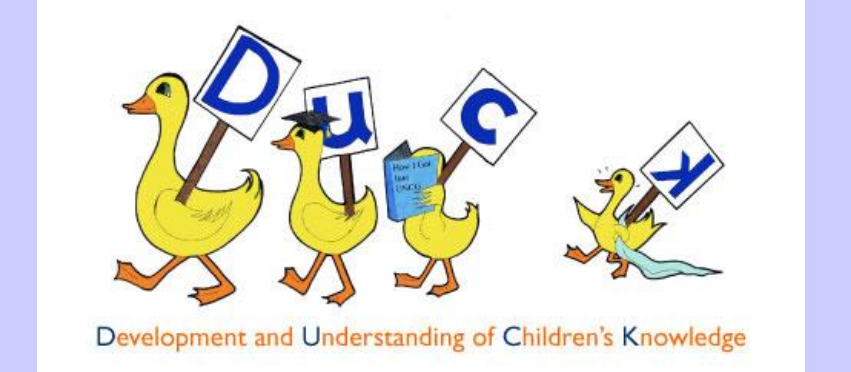


Children's Moral Judgments About Necessary and Luxury Resource Inequality in Unprovoked and Retaliatory Situations



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Introduction

Children prefer fair resource allocation as early as infancy and the ability to engage in moral reasoning about resource inequality develops through middle childhood (Paulus, 2015; Rizzo et al., 2016; Sommerville et al., 2013)

- With age, children are increasingly able to reason about multi-faceted resource inequality (e.g., resource type, situation context)

Resource Type: Necessary vs. Luxury Resources

- Necessary resource inequality is rated as more wrong than luxury resource inequality due to concerns for others' welfare (Rizzo et al., 2016)
- By 6 to 8 years of age, children distinguish between necessary (e.g., food) and luxury (e.g., toys) resources when asked to make moral judgments about resource inequality (Rizzo et al., 2016).

Situation Context: Unprovoked vs. Retaliatory Inequality

- Children rate in-kind retaliation as less wrong than unprovoked moral transgressions beginning in preschool (Smetana et al., 1999)
- Moral concepts of retaliation continue to develop through middle childhood, with older children condemning retaliation more strongly than younger children (Smetana et al., 2003)

Hypotheses:

- All children will view unprovoked necessary resource inequality as the most immoral inequality
- Older children (i.e., 7- to 8-year-olds) will view retaliatory necessary inequality as more wrong than retaliatory luxury inequality

Method (Cont.)

- Following each vignette, participants were asked the following questions:
 1. *Acceptability*: How good or bad was it for Mya to not give Zoe any crackers for snack like the other kids?
 - 1a. *Acceptability rating justification*: Why do you think it was [very good-very bad] for Mya not to give Zoe any crackers for snack?
 2. *Authority Independence*: If it was ok with the teacher, how good or bad was it for Mya to not give Zoe crackers to eat like the other kids? (Figure 1)
 3. *Rule Independence*: If it was not breaking any classroom rules, how good or bad was it for Mya to not give Zoe crackers to eat like the other kids?
- A composite moral judgment rating was used in analyses and reflects the average rating across questions 1-3 (see Figure 1 for rating scale).

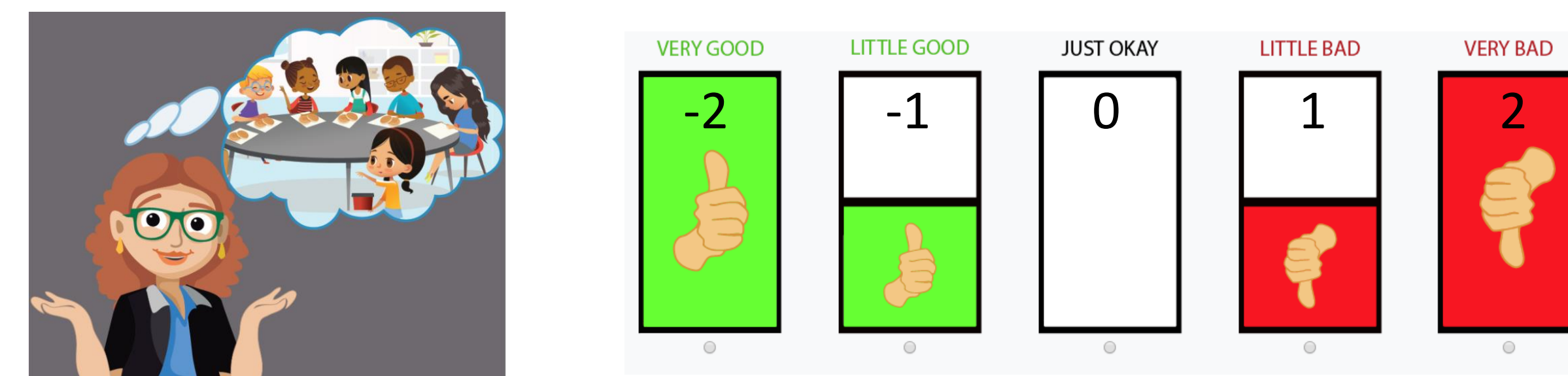


Figure 1. Authority Independence and Rating Scale Visuals

- Acceptability Rating Justification Codes (Smetana & Ball, 2018):
 - *Welfare*: Act involves or causes harm, injury, loss, or otherwise negatively affects others' wellbeing
 - *Justice*: Act is unfair or causes inequality; references to reciprocity
 - *Inconsequential Act*: Act is unimportant or has little effect on self or others

Results (Cont.)

Acceptability Rating Justifications: 2 (resource type- within) x 2 (situation context- within) x 2 (age group- between) mixed ANOVAs for Welfare, Justice, and Inconsequential Act coding categories (see Table 1 for category frequencies).

- *Welfare*: A significant interaction between resource and situation with follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that more welfare justifications were provided for unprovoked-necessary inequality compared to all other inequality situations, $F(1, 75) = 28.87, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$.
- *Justice*: More justice justifications were provided for retaliatory inequality compared to unprovoked inequality, $F(1, 75) = 14.98, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$. Older children were more likely to reference reciprocity in their justifications, $F(1, 75) = 8.41, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .10$
- *Inconsequential Act*: More inconsequential act justifications were provided for luxury compared to necessary resources, $F(1, 75) = 24.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$.

| | Unprovoked-Necessary | Retaliatory-Necessary | Unprovoked-Luxury | Retaliatory-Luxury |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Welfare | 44 | 16 | 14 | 9 |
| Justice | 12 | 32 | 23 | 33 |
| Inconsequential Act | 0 | 1 | 18 | 8 |

Table 1. Frequencies of Acceptability Justification Coding Categories by Inequality Vignette Type

Method

Participants

- 38 4- to 6-year-old children and 39 7- to 8-year-old children ($M = 6.83$ years, $SD = 1.48$ years; 44 girls)

Materials & Procedure

- Four gender-matched vignettes were presented to all participants: unprovoked-necessary resource, retaliatory-necessary resource, unprovoked-luxury resource, retaliatory-luxury resource

NECESSARY:
Mya and Zoe both need snacks. If Mya and Zoe have snacks to eat, they are healthy, happy, and have a lot of fun. But if Mya and Zoe don't have snacks to eat, it hurts them a lot, and they will get very sick!

LUXURY:
Ella and Lilly both like toys. If Ella and Lilly have toys, they are happy and have a lot of fun. But if Ella and Lilly don't have toys to play with, they can still be happy and have a lot of fun; they can play with other things!

UNPROVOKED-NECESSARY:
One day during snack time, the teacher asked Mya to hand out the crackers to the class for snack. Mya gave all the other kids crackers to eat, but when she got to Zoe, she did not give her any crackers for snack.

RETALIATORY-NECESSARY:
The next day during snack time, the teacher asked Zoe to hand out the snacks to the class. Because Mya did not give Zoe a snack before, Zoe gave all the other kids crackers to eat, but when she got to Mya, she did not give her any crackers to get back at her.

Results

Moral Judgment Ratings: 2 (resource type - within) x 2 (situation context - within) x 2 (age group - between) mixed ANOVA

- Unprovoked situations were rated as more wrong than retaliatory situations, $F(1, 75) = 19.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$.
- Unprovoked-necessary inequality ($M = 1.01, SD = 0.71$) was rated as more wrong than unprovoked-luxury inequality ($M = 0.81, SD = 0.79$). There were no rating differences between retaliatory-necessary inequality ($M = 0.54, SD = 1.12$) and retaliatory-luxury inequality ($M = 0.58, SD = 1.05$), $F(1, 75) = 4.16, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .05$ (see Figure 2).
- There were no age effects or interactions, all $ps > .10$.

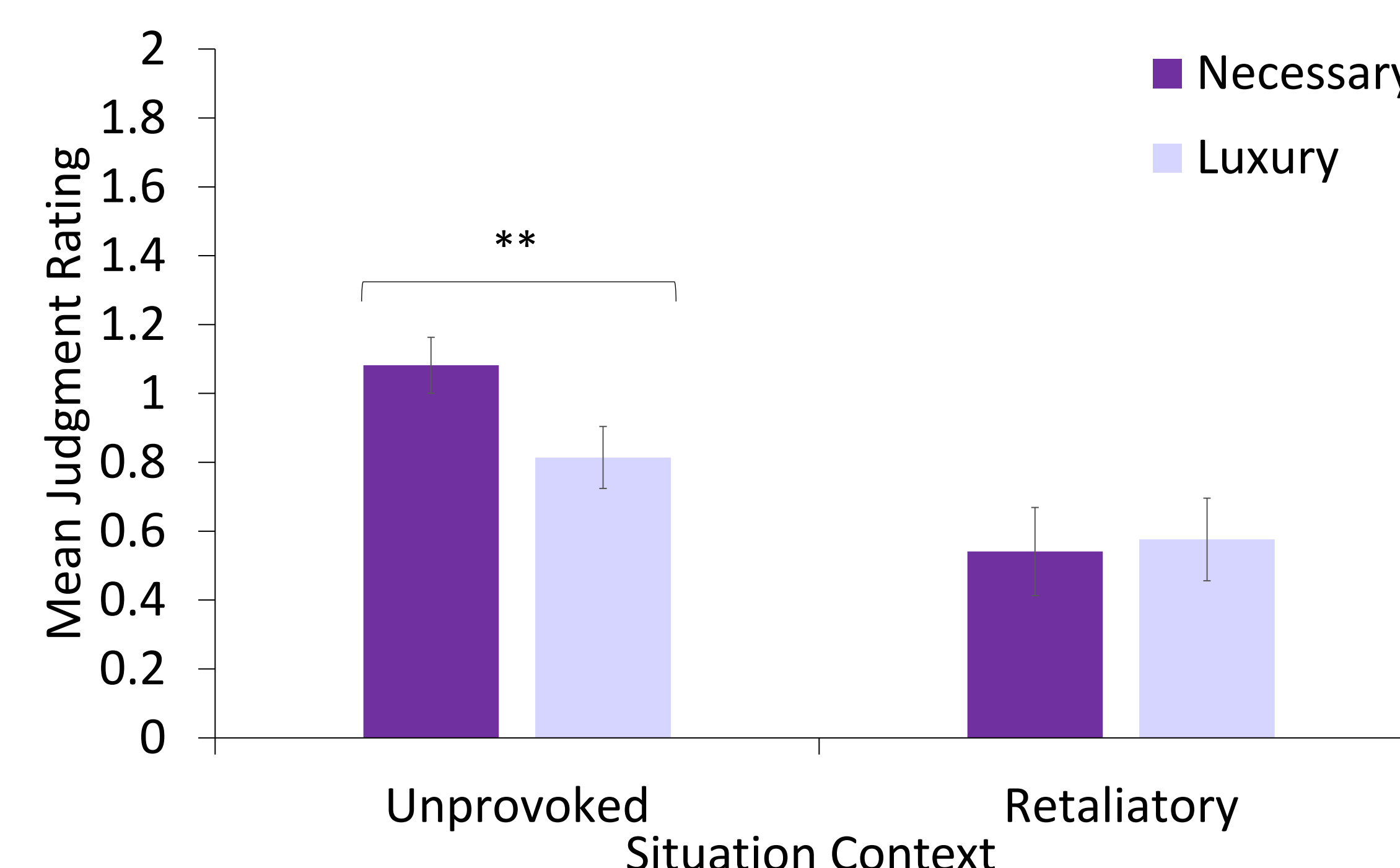


Figure 2. Resource Type by Situation Context Interaction
Note. ** $p < .01$

Discussion

The current study is the first to show how children judge resource inequality while taking both resource type and situation context into consideration.

- Consistent with previous literature, children across both age groups view necessary resource inequality as causing harm and condemn instances of unprovoked harm (e.g., Rizzo et al., 2016; Smetana et al., 1999).
- The surprising lack of distinction between necessary and luxury resource retaliation suggests that children prioritized the need for justice over concerns related to harm when asked to judge the instances of inequality.
 - Children may have believed that necessary resource retribution was warranted because of the harm caused by the original transgression.
 - The predicted age effect may have been offset by older children's propensity to justify their retaliation acceptability ratings by referencing the need for reciprocity.
- Despite previous findings that children have an aversion toward the unfair distribution of non-necessary resources (e.g., stickers; Paulus, 2015), children may dismiss inequal distribution transgressions as inconsequential if alternative solutions are presented (e.g., "they can play with other things!").

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