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Proper Artifact Use: The Action-Protest Paradigm

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Background

• Research suggests that there is shared agreement among a community about the conventionalised functions of artifacts based upon how a community uses that object (German, Truxaw & Defeyter, 2007; Seston, Kelemen, & DiYanni, submitted).

▪ Casler, Terziyan & Greene (2009) used Rakoczy, Warneken & Tomasello, (2008) action-protest paradigm and suggest that toddlers demonstrate a normatively defined awareness that there are right and wrong ways to act upon objects.

• However, Casler and colleagues always demonstrated the conventional function during the familiarisation phase, followed by a puppet demonstrating an alternate function during the test phase.

Method

Participants:

23 children aged between 3 and 5 years (mean = 3.5 years; range = 3.1 - 5.2), 9 males, 14 females were observed in a testing session which took place in a nursery or school setting.

Procedure:

Children were randomly allocated to 1 of 3 conditions in which three familiar objects, toothbrush, baby bottle and crayon, had a different function.

Idiosyncratic- Conventional	Brushing hair - Cleaning teeth	Rolling dough - Drinking	Stirring mixture - Drawing
Instrumental- Conventional	Jabbing - Cleaning teeth	Drawing circles - Drinking	Tapping - Drawing
Instrumental- Idiosyncratic	Jabbing - Brushing hair	Drawing circles - Rolling dough	Tapping - Stirring mixture



Each condition consisted of a familiarisation phase followed by a test phase. Within each condition, the familiarisation function and test function were counterbalanced. All demonstrations were carried out by two puppets 'Sam' and 'Sally'.

Function knowledge check: At the end of each trial children were asked, "What is a toothbrush used for? What is a bottle used for? What is a crayon used for?" All sessions were videotaped for coding.

Measures:

Scores for expressions of normative protest:

Overt protest (2 points): E.g., explicit telling off, "No! It's not for that!"

Implicit protest (1 point): E.g., laughing at Sally's use of the objects, scrutinising Sally's behaviour by looking quizzically at what she was doing with the objects.

Predictions:

1. If Casler and colleagues are correct then toddlers should only protest when the conventional function is violated.
2. However, if toddlers are simply protesting against a violation of the artifact's use 'in this context', then it would appear that whilst children do have a normative awareness regarding conventional function they are quite flexible in terms of the use of an object across different function contexts.

References:

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- Seston, R., Kelemen, D., & DiYanni, C. (submitted for publication). Previous reliability or consensual majority? Determining the better source for conventional knowledge.