



## Introduction

- Tomasello and Vaish (2013) suggest that children undergo a two-step sequence in normative development.
- Before age 3, children interpret norms as individual directives. In the second stage, thought to develop at around age 3, children understand norms as agent-neutral group-level expectations.
- To detect this shift in norm understanding, we can study whether children distinguish norms from preferences.
- Norms and preferences are similar because they both have a world-to-mind direction of fit (Searle, 2001). However, they differ in source and generalizability.

## Question

**Question:** At what age do children distinguish group norms from individual preferences?

We **directly** test the normative development of 3-year-olds by comparing their compliance to norms and preferences.

**Hypothesis:** Three-and-a-half-year-old children will have the ability to recognize norms and therefore are expected to prioritize conforming to them over conforming to their peer’s individual preferences.

## Methods

Sample: 52 3.5-year-olds were recruited from the Research Participation at Duke Pool. M = 3.48, range: 3.21 – 3.74. American children from the Durham, NC area.

Procedure:

- The child is led to believe they are Skyping a peer in another room who is setting up for a tea party.
- In a within-subjects design, the child is asked to set up four items (e.g., plate, cup, tea, and snack).
- Each item has 4 options to choose from (e.g., 4 different plates).
- 2 of the items are selected by the informant based on a norm and 2 of the items are selected based on a preference.

## Measures



- Compliance: Which object does the child choose to set up?
- Protest: Does the child protest when the puppet selects a different object?

## Testimony

Oh look, here are some square white plates. For *tea parties at Duke, we always use this kind* of plate. So, *we’re going to set up the ones that we always use!*

Oh look, here are some square white plates. For *my tea party today, I feel like using this plate*. So, *I’m going to set up this one that I feel like using!*



### Norm Condition

Cultural Category: “Tea parties at Duke”

Group: “We”

Generality: “We always use X”

### Preference Condition

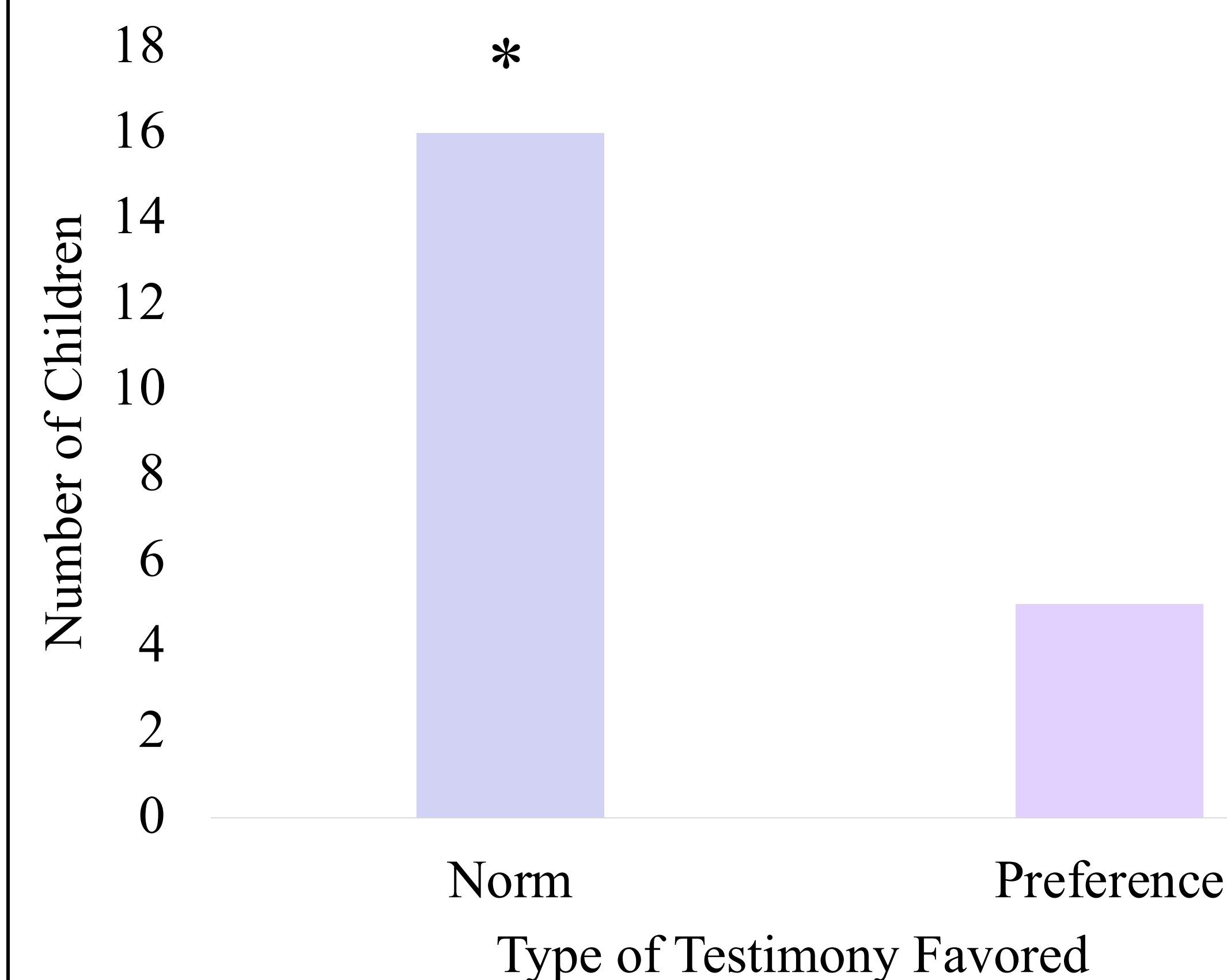
Cultural Category: “My tea party today”

Group: “I”

Generality: “I feel like using X”

## Results

- Some children always (4) or never (27) conformed.
- Among those who did favor a testimony type, significantly more favored norms (16) over preferences (5) than expected by chance, binomial  $p < .05$ .



## Discussion

- The present study directly tests the idea that children shift their thinking about social norms at age 3 (Tomasello & Vaish, 2013).
- Our results support this hypothesis given that children at 3 choose items more when they are endorsed by a norm as opposed to a preference.
- 3-year-olds’ compliance with norms is more than just a tendency to conform in general and more than just respect for adult authority, given that the informant was a child.
- Provides insight into normative learning among children, as it indicates that children do conform to peer-modeled norms.

## References & Acknowledgements

Searle, J. R. (2001). *Rationality in Action*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.  
Tomasello, M., & Vaish, A. (2013). Origins of human cooperation and morality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 64, 231–255.

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