

Peer Review Comments

Article: Thomas, A J, Stanford, P K and Sarnecka, B W 2016 No Child Left Alone: Moral Judgments about Parents Affect Estimates of Risk to Children. *Collabra*, 2(1): 10, pp. 1–14, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/collabra.33>

Article type: Original Research Article

Subject: Psychology

Editor: Rolf Zwaan, Alexa Tullett

Article submitted: 10 October 2015

Editor decision: 22 February 2016, 17 July 2016

Revision submitted: 03 July 2016

Article accepted: 17 July 2016

Article published: 23 August 2016

Responses for Version 1

Reviewer: This reviewer has chosen to remain anonymous

Affiliation: --

Competing Interests Statement: No competing interests.

Review Completed: 16 November 2015

Recommendation: Accept Submission

1) General comments and summary of recommendation:

Describe your overall impressions and your recommendation, including changes or revisions. Please note that you should pay attention to scientific, methodological, and ethical soundness only, not novelty, topicality, or scope. A checklist of things to you may want to consider is below:

- Are the methodologies used appropriate?
- Are any methodological weaknesses addressed?
- Is all statistical analysis sound?
- Does the conclusion (if present) reflect the argument, is it supported by data/facts?
- Is the article logically structured, succinct, and does the argument flow coherently?
- Are the references adequate and appropriate?

I think this was a great paper and recommend acceptance. The paper tackles an interesting question with well-designed and well-powered studies (within-subjects is a great idea here). It is also very tightly written and presented. This could have been a much wordier paper. I really only have a couple minor comments (here and below).

1. Effect sizes were missing. I would like to see those.

2. In Study 4, did moral judgments mediate risk judgments? It seems like on the authors' theory, they should.

2) Figures/tables/data availability:

Please comment on the author's use of tables, charts, figures, if relevant. Please acknowledge that adequate underlying data is available to ensure reproducibility (see open data policies per discipline of Collabra here).

Table 3 should list the study numbers in the table somehow. Otherwise, it's a lot to parse.

3) Ethical approval:

If humans or animals have been used as research subjects, and/or tissue or field sampling, are the necessary statements of ethical approval by a relevant authority present? Where humans have participated in research, informed consent should also be declared.

If not, please detail where you think a further ethics approval/statement/follow-up is required.

I didn't see anything about ethics approval but frankly in a study where adults were shown hypothetical scenarios I find the whole idea of ethics/consent to be a tad ridiculous.

4) Language:

Is the text well written and jargon free? Please comment on the quality of English and any need for improvement beyond the scope of this process.

Yes. Very good writing overall. Some over-use of "etc." that the authors may want to tone down.

Reviewer: Paul Conway

Affiliation: Florida State University, USA

Competing Interests Statement: None.

Review Completed: 17 February 2016

Recommendation: Revisions Required

1) General comments and summary of recommendation:

Describe your overall impressions and your recommendation, including changes or revisions. Please note that you should pay attention to scientific, methodological, and ethical soundness only, not novelty, topicality, or scope. A checklist of things to you may want to consider is below:

- Are the methodologies used appropriate?
- Are any methodological weaknesses addressed?
- Is all statistical analysis sound?
- Does the conclusion (if present) reflect the argument, is it supported by data/facts?
- Is the article logically structured, succinct, and does the argument flow coherently?
- Are the references adequate and appropriate?

The authors present data from five studies demonstrating that people estimate higher risk to children left alone for ostensibly immoral reasons than for less immoral or accidental reasons. Overall the article is fairly strong—the introduction reads well and covers most relevant literature, the article examines an understudied topic, and the authors presents an extensive amount of quite consistent data. That said, I don't think this work will have a major impact on the field or major theories—it is more of an application of theory to a particular topic.

Major Points

The authors do a nice job in the intro of describing the changing social norms around child abandonment. However, their goal is to examine the impact of moral judgments on perceptions, and to this end wrote scenarios of varying moral importance. This is the part that needs the most buffing up—why did the authors write these particular scenarios? What gives them confidence that people view them as different on morality specifically (rather than other features)?

In Study 2, the authors claim they “replaced the mothers in the stories with fathers, to see whether risk estimates are equally affected by moral judgments about parents of both genders” but this cannot be assessed as they did not examine perceptions of both genders within the same study. They cannot draw conclusions by comparing across studies as they cannot guarantee random assignment across experiments (only within them). Accordingly, the authors should tone down this claim. The same is true of Experiment 3.

The authors note that the mean response was fairly high (~6) and the mode was 10—this suggests substantial inter-individual variability in judgments. It would be interesting to hear what the authors thoughts are regarding the sources of this variability. Does everyone judge similarly, and if not, why not? This could be handled briefly in the discussion section but in my view might be more theoretically interesting in than the data presented here.

In addition to the risk question, the authors sometimes examined perceptions of morality etc. What were the correlations between these measures (and do they differ across condition)? This might help clarify how much people rely on assessments of immorality when forming risk judgments.

The authors claim that “In reality, of course, children who are allowed to be alone in circumstances

approved by their parents are undoubtedly safer than children who find themselves alone by accident." I disagree—I suspect that participants are inferring that the kind of parent who intentionally leaves their children alone is generally less attentive and engaged in their children's lives than a parent who rarely does so except when circumstances force their hand. They would have to control for perceived/real differences in parenting style in order to make this claim, or else present empirical data to verify it. I suggest the authors soften the argument here. Researchers should always exert caution when interpreting the responses of ordinary people as reflecting irrational bias—often this is only true compared to the researcher's own definitions of what is a priori correct, which may not necessarily be correct. I appreciate that the authors modified their question wording to address this point, but doing so does not rule out reasonable assumptions that participants might make (e.g., participants might infer that less attentive parents may be lower SES and therefore leave their children alone in objectively more dangerous environments, such as inner-city locations, compared to parents who only abandon their children when circumstances require).

Minor Points

The authors claim that in Haidt's model people "use facts to rationalize" (p. 4) but this model is better described as people "using reasoning to rationalize" which may or may not involve facts.

I suggest the authors present the means in the same order for all studies and in all graphs—there are currently some inconsistencies.

When presenting means, please also present standard deviations.

There are a fair number of APA formatting errors that should get cleaned up, especially in terms of overall structure and in the tables.

The authors compare the size of the main effect in one study to the other studies. Again, without random assignment, it is dangerous to make this interpretation. The authors should rephrase this point with more caution.

2) Figures/tables/data availability:

Please comment on the author's use of tables, charts, figures, if relevant. Please acknowledge that adequate underlying data is available to ensure reproducibility (see open data policies per discipline of Collabra here).

I suggest the authors present the means in the same order for all studies and in all graphs—there are currently some inconsistencies.

It is odd that the data is presented as a bar graph in one case and line graph in another--this kind of data should generally always be presented as bar graphs.

The tables should be reformatted to fit APA guidelines.

3) Ethical approval:

If humans or animals have been used as research subjects, and/or tissue or field sampling, are the necessary statements of ethical approval by a relevant authority present? Where humans have participated in research, informed consent should also be declared.

If not, please detail where you think a further ethics approval/statement/follow-up is required.

No problem here.

4) Language:

Is the text well written and jargon free? Please comment on the quality of English and any need for improvement beyond the scope of this process.

The language is generally clear and engaging, and appealing to a wide audience.

Editor Decision for Version 1

Editor: Alexa Tullett

Affiliation: University of Alabama, USA

Editor decision: Revisions required

Decision date: 22 February 2016

Dear Ms Ashley J Thomas,

After review, we have reached a decision regarding your submission to Collabra, "NO CHILD LEFT ALONE: Moral judgments about parents affect estimates of risk to children.". Our decision is to request revisions of the manuscript prior to acceptance for publication.

The full review information should be included at the bottom of this email. There may also be a copy of the manuscript file with reviewer comments available once you have accessed the submission account. A summary of the requested edits from the editorial team can be found below. Please consider these points and revise the file accordingly:

Editorial Revision Requests:

Major revisions:

- In general I thought the support for your main claim - that people's moral judgments influence risk judgments - was quite strong. You also make an additional claim in the abstract, and again in the discussion, that "people systematically overestimate the danger to unsupervised children, in part to justify the intuition that parents who leave their children alone have done something morally wrong." Currently, I don't think that you directly test the justification hypothesis. It seems plausible that people are not engaging in motivated reasoning, but are instead confounding the notion of "putting a child in danger" with the notion of "irresponsible parenting" and letting considerations of the latter influence their answers to questions about the former. While I don't think that this makes the findings any less interesting, I do think this account is different from a motivated reasoning account, and is worth some discussion.

- I and both Reviewers were curious about the relationship between moral judgments and risk judgments in Experiment 4. Given the proposed causal account, I think it would be helpful to test the mediation model as suggested by Reviewer A (i.e., condition -> moral judgment -> risk judgment).

- There were some aspects of the statistical analyses that were unclear to me. First, were gender, age, and parent-status controlled for in the analyses? If so, do the results change if these variables are not controlled for? Also, how many participants were excluded because they took less than 5 minutes? Do the results change if these participants are included?

Minor revisions:

- I agree with Reviewer B that making claims based on comparisons across studies is problematic. Although I think you can still discuss these possibilities, I would tone down these claims.

- I believe there is an error on p. 4 where you say that this "illicit lover" story will be called the "Relax" condition.

To access your submission account, follow the below instructions:

- 1) login to the journal webpage with username and password
- 2) click on the submission title
- 3) click 'Review' menu option
- 4) download Reviewed file and make revisions based on review feedback

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6) Click the 'notify editor' icon and email the confirmation of re-submission and any relevant comments to the journal.

Please ensure that your revised files adhere to our author guidelines, and that the files are fully copyedited/proofed prior to upload. Please also ensure that all copyright permissions have been obtained. This is the last opportunity for major editing, therefore please fully check your file prior to re-submission.

If you have any questions or difficulties during this process, please do contact us.

Please could you have the revisions submitted by March 7, 2016. If you cannot make this deadline, please let us know as early as possible.

Kind regards,

Alexa Tullett

University of Alabama, USA

atullett@bama.ua.edu

Author's Response to Review Comments for Version 1

Author: Ashley Thomas

Affiliation: University of California, Irvine, USA

Revision submitted: 03 July 2016

Dear Dr. Tullett,

Attached is the revised manuscript and the cover letter with responses to the reviewers. These documents have also been uploaded to the Collabra.org site.

Thank you for your patience.

Best,

Ashley Thomas

Attached document:

Available for download at: <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ubiquity-partner-network/ucp/journal/collabra/collabra-33-opr-attached.pdf>

Editor Decision for Version 2

Editor: Alexa Tullett

Affiliation: University of Alabama, USA

Editor decision: Submission Accepted

Decision date: 17 July 2016

Dear Ms Ashley J Thomas,

After review, we have reached a decision regarding your submission to Collabra, "NO CHILD LEFT ALONE: Moral judgments about parents affect estimates of risk to children.", and are happy to

accept your submission for publication, pending the completion of copyediting and formatting processes.

As there are no further reviewer revisions to make, you do not have to complete any tasks at this point. The accepted submission will now undergo final copyediting. You will be contacted once this is complete to answer any queries that may have arisen during copyediting and to allow a final chance to edit the files prior to typesetting. If you wish to view your submission during this time, you can log in via the journal website.

The review information should be included in this email.

Kind regards,

Alexa Tullett

University of Alabama, USA

atullett@bama.ua.edu