

# Intentional or Accidental?

- How understanding the distinction impacts children's moral judgements

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# Morality

## moral adjective



mor·al | \ 'mór-əl (with speaker icon), 'mär- \

### Definition of moral (Entry 1 of 2)

- 1 a : of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior : [ETHICAL](#)  
// *moral judgments*
- b : expressing or teaching a [conception](#) of right behavior  
// *a moral poem*
- c : conforming to a standard of right behavior  
// *took a moral position on the issue though it cost him the nomination*
- d : sanctioned by or [operative](#) on one's conscience or ethical judgment  
// *a moral obligation*
- e : capable of right and wrong action  
// *a moral agent*

“Moral judgment refers to a decision about what one should do in a morally problematic situation, what is right and what is wrong when deciding what to do.”

*Moral Judgement - an overview / ScienceDirect Topics.* (n.d.)



# What We Know from Previous Research



# Development of Intention Concepts in Children



Between ages 4 and 6...

Event-Outcome Seriousness → Motives of those involved

Piaget 1932

Kohlberg 1964

As children age, their ability to distinguish intention from accident  
**increases**



King 1971



# Behavioral Prediction and Punishment



Behavioral prediction improves with age

Behavioral prediction becomes more difficult with noncanonical causal systems

Older children and adults are more likely to use a conjunction rule to assign punishment

3 and 4-year-olds typically use simple intention or outcome rules

Zelazo, P. D., Helwig, C. C., & Lau, A. 1996





## C&C3 at the SAMC Lab



How do children think about other children's actions?

- Should the person who accidentally did something bad get in trouble or should the person who tried to do something bad get in trouble?
  - Do you want to learn more about the person who demonstrated prosocial behavior or transgressive behavior?
  - How many stickers do you want to take away from the individuals with transgressive behavior?
- 



# C&C3 at the SAMC Lab

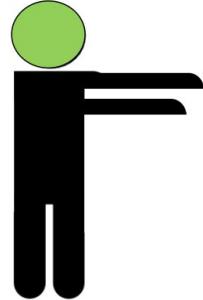


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This person accidentally stole an apple after it rolled into their shopping basket when they weren't looking



This person tried to steal an apple, but it rolled out of their shopping basket when they weren't looking

Which person should get in trouble?  
How much trouble should they get into?

# My Predictions

## Younger Age Group (4–6)

- Will focus more on the **outcome** rather than the intention
- Will, therefore, be more likely to state that **individuals who accidentally do something bad** should get in trouble

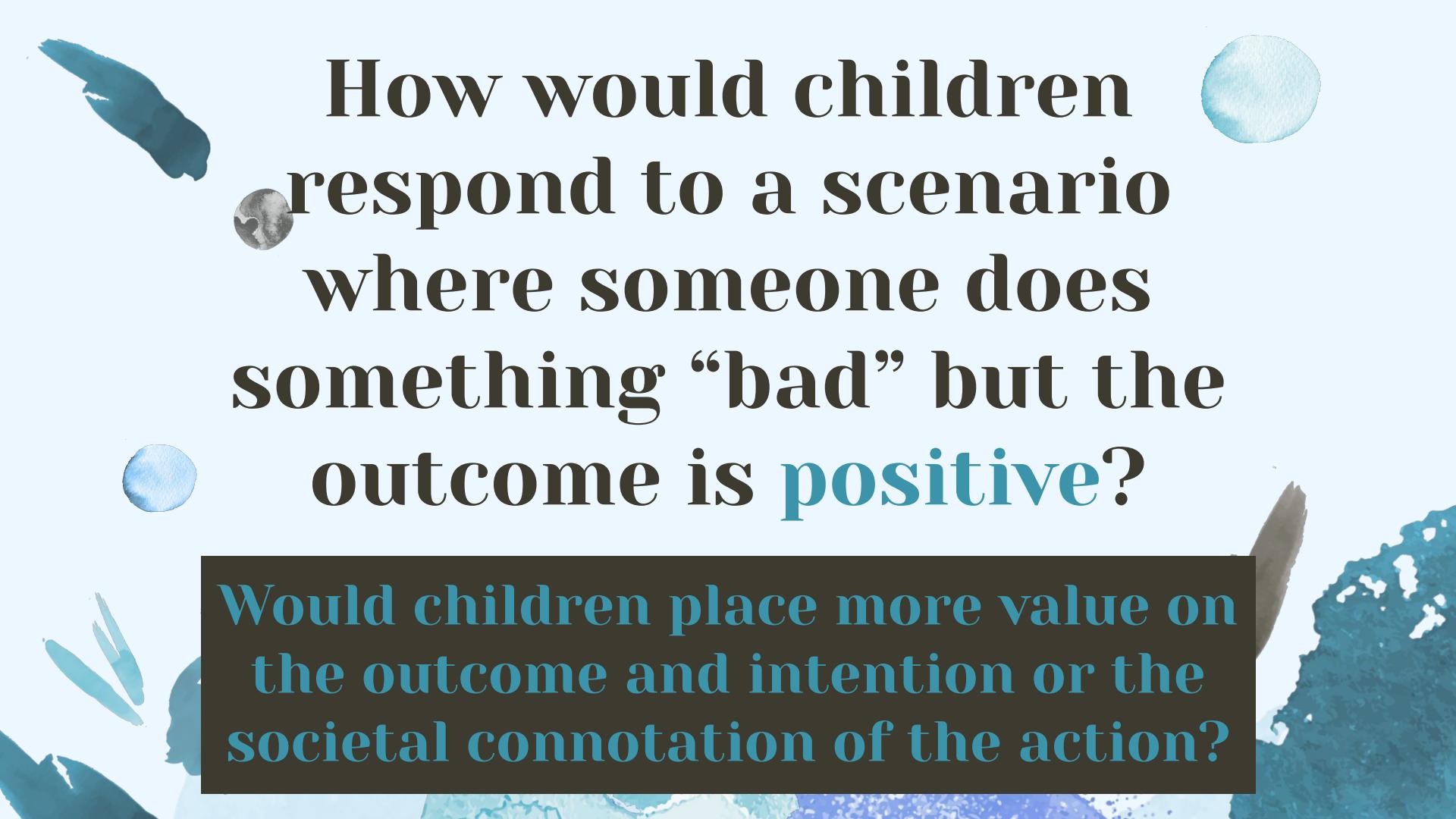
## Older Age Group (7–9)

- Will be **more capable** of distinguishing between intention and accident
- Will place more importance on **intention** rather than outcome
- Will, therefore, be more likely to believe that **people who try to do something bad (and fail)** deserve to get in trouble

# My Questions

When the ability to apply the conjunction rule is removed, will children punish people based on intention or outcome?

For C&C3, how would the results differ if the conjunction rule **could** be applied?



**How would children  
respond to a scenario  
where someone does  
something “bad” but the  
outcome is positive?**

**Would children place more value on  
the outcome and intention or the  
societal connotation of the action?**

# THANKS!

CREDITS: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**

The background features a light blue textured surface with darker blue organic shapes resembling leaves or petals. A large, dark blue globe is visible on the right side.

# Questions?



# RESOURCES

Zelazo, P. D., Helwig, C. C., & Lau, A. (1996). Intention, Act, and Outcome in Behavioral Prediction and Moral Judgment. *Child Development*, 67(5), 2478. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131635>



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<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/moral-judgement>

Merriam Webster. (2014). *Definition of MORAL.* Merriam-Webster.com.  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moral>