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## Developing an understanding of social norms and games

### Emotional engagement, nonverbal agreement, and conversation

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**DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL NORMS AND  
GAMES: EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT, NONVERBAL  
AGREEMENT, AND CONVERSATION**

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Abstract:	The first part of the article examines some recent studies on the early development of social norms that examine young children's understanding of codified rule games. It is argued that the constitutive rules that define the games cannot be identified with social norms and therefore the studies provide limited evidence about socio-normative development. The second part reviews data on children's play in natural settings that show that children do not understand norms as codified or rules of obligation, and that the norms that guide social interaction are dynamic, situated, and heterogeneous. It is argued that normativity is intersubjective and negotiable and starts to develop in the first year, emerging as a practical skill that depends on participatory engagement. Three sources of compliance are discussed: emotional engagement, nonverbal agreement, and conversation.

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3 **DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL NORMS AND GAMES:**  
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5 **EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT, NONVERBAL AGREEMENT, AND**  
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7 **CONVERSATION**  
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### Testing children's understanding of norms

In a series of studies, Hannes Rakoczy and his colleagues have investigated young children's understanding of norms in pretend play using a new experimental paradigm which tests for the understanding of constitutive rules (Rakoczy, 2007; Rakoczy, 2006; Rakoczy, Warneken, and Tomasello, 2008; Wyman, Rakoczy, and Tomasello, 2009). The idea behind the paradigm is that constitutive rules, as opposed to regulative rules, are typical of human forms of life.

The theoretical framework of the experiments comes from philosopher John Searle.

Constitutive rules introduce novel social and institutional facts into a community or group of people (Searle, 1969, 2005). In contrast, regulative rules guide activities or practices that depend on means-end relations and in principle could occur independently of rules (Searle, 1969).

The studies aim to determine at what age young children appreciate the basic normative structure of rule games and games of pretence and examine their awareness of the context-relativity of normative rules (Rakoczy et al., 2009; Wyman et al., 2009). The experiments rely on the assumption that children's rule games and games of pretence share the normative structure of social reality (Rakoczy et al., 2009). The suggestion is that if a child understands how rules or norms function in play, then she understands how social norms function at large in society. Rakoczy et al. (2009) claim that the normative structure of games underlies the whole of institutional reality. If true, this claim justifies the belief that investigating children's awareness of the normative structure of rule games is central to explaining the development of normative understanding. But why think that the structure of rules games and pretence is the same as that of social reality? And why think that this structure is normative?

There is something puzzling about Rakoczy's suggestion that rule games and the human social world share the same normative structure. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the

1  
2  
3 fundamental ontological structure of social reality at all is normative. Searle himself (1995,  
4  
5 2008, 2010) argues that human social reality is a construction of objective, non-normative  
6  
7 social facts, some of which are institutional and arbitrary. He holds that social facts are  
8  
9 created by a group's collective assignment of conventional status functions to objects, events,  
10  
11 and individuals by way of constitutive rules. He does not claim that these rules are normative.  
12  
13 The rules *constitute* or *define* social facts.  
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15

16  
17 Constitutive rules are declarative speech acts of the form 'X counts as (constitutes) Y in  
18  
19 context C'. They tell us that in a certain context (say, a game of football), an action of type Y  
20  
21 (say, scoring) can be performed by means of an action of a different type X (say, kicking the  
22  
23 ball into the goal), and an entity of type X can count as an entity of a different type Y. As an  
24  
25 example of how a constitutive rule creates an institutional fact, consider the declaration  
26

27  
28 **(CR<sub>money</sub>)** This kind of piece of paper <euro note> counts as money in Europe  
29  
30 uttered while demonstrating a euro note. Systems of constitutive rules bring human  
31  
32 institutions into existence, such as money, government, education, and legal structures.  
33

34  
35 Rakoczy's claim that children's games and social reality share the normative structure  
36  
37 revolves around the presupposition that constitutive rules are normative, i.e., do not merely  
38  
39 define a form of activity (say, a game), but *prescribe* behaviour. Rakoczy et al. (2009) argue  
40  
41 that the *normative* structure of games depends on the collective assignment of status function  
42  
43 to entities by constitutive rules, and the experiments target social norms that regulate the  
44  
45 interaction between agents or groups of agents. However, because the experiments are  
46  
47 designed to test the understanding of constitutive rules in the exact form that Searle gives to  
48  
49 such rules, the outcome is another than predicted (Brinck, in press). The experiments  
50  
51 determine at what age children understand constitutive rules — not the social norms that  
52  
53 regulate the ensuing interaction once a social fact such as a game has been created. To see  
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3 this, consider the following experiment which tests for children's capacity to understand what  
4  
5 it means to "dax" (Rakoczy et al., 2008).  
6

7 In the model phase, an adult shows 2- and 3-year-old children new game actions according  
8  
9 to the schema "Action X counts as activity (game) Y in context C". The adult performs  
10  
11 actions A1 and A2. A1 is marked as "daxing," A2 as an accidental mistake. In the action  
12  
13 phase, it is the child's turn to play the game of daxing and learn how to dax. In the test phase,  
14  
15 a third person (a puppet) enters and announces: "I'm gonna dax now!" In the target condition,  
16  
17 the puppet performs an action that is mistaken, given the structure of the game. Children's  
18  
19 responses to such mistaken actions, in particular protest and correction, are taken as indicators  
20  
21 of their awareness of the normative structure of the game.  
22  
23

24  
25 According to Rakoczy and his colleagues, the 3-year-olds, but not the 2-year-olds, saw the  
26  
27 puppet's actions as not conforming to the social norm of daxing, and enforced the norm,  
28  
29 telling the puppet how to act. They take the experiments to show that 3-year-olds understand  
30  
31 social norms. However, notice that the experiments test the understanding of constitutive  
32  
33 rules, whereas the conclusion concerns the understanding of social norms. Identifying  
34  
35 constitutive rules with social norms is a crucial step in the argument, one that it is likely that  
36  
37 Searle himself would resist. The question is whether it is valid. Next, it will be argued that  
38  
39 constitutive rules are not identical to social norms and therefore the argument is invalid.  
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#### 47 **What the experiments show**

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52 A constitutive rule specifies a social fact by declaring what an action, object, or individual  
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54 counts as, or constitutes. The declarative utterance involves a demonstration (e.g., an act of  
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56 pointing or showing) of the object, event, or person that the rule concerns and specifies the  
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3 context in which the definition holds. Declaratives bring social facts into existence by mere  
4  
5 definition, as in the following examples:

6  
7 (Ex. 1) This [beanbag] counts as a chair in Denmark.  
8

9  
10 (Ex. 2) This [move] counts as checkmate in the game of chess.

11  
12 Searle (1969) denies that constitutive rules are prescriptive and constitute norms that may be  
13  
14 violated and of which violations are penalized. Rhetorically, he asks: “[A]fter all, what  
15  
16 penalty is there for violating the rule that baseball is played with nine men on a side?” (1969,  
17  
18 p. 41).  
19

20  
21 Constitutive rules determine what counts as doing Y, but do not commit nor entitle  
22  
23 anybody to perform the action Y. For instance, none of the rules of football commits the  
24  
25 players to scoring a goal, nor to not scoring a goal. The rules determine what *counts as*  
26  
27 scoring a goal (*what it means* to score a goal), but do not determine that the players *should*  
28  
29 score. Thus, constitutive rules do not enforce, but create social facts. They define and so  
30  
31 identify and introduce new activities. By using constitutive rules to ascribe status functions  
32  
33 relative to contexts, humans create novel states of the world (Searle, 1995). Once declared,  
34  
35 the rule opens up for the possibility to enforce it or create a policy for its implementation.  
36  
37 Generally, constitutive rules reveal new domains of action and interaction that then require  
38  
39 regulation. Usually, social facts come with commitments or powers. They do not themselves  
40  
41 bring about powers, but are embedded in shared practices that are normative.  
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45  
46 Millikan (2014) makes the same point as Searle, arguing that constitutive rules such as  
47  
48 those of chess do not mandate behaviour or tell you what to do. She argues that constitutive  
49  
50 rules are ‘constitutive’ only in the purely verbal sense; they define what is called ‘playing  
51  
52 chess’ and that is all they do. Suppose you agree to play chess with somebody but get tired  
53  
54 and stop half way through, or because of pity refuse to pronounce the other player checkmate  
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56 although you are in the position to do so. Have you then broken the agreement? There is a  
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3 social or normative mandate not to break it, but this mandate does not concern the game itself,  
4  
5 but the players and their mutual expectations. The set of constitutive rules that defines the  
6  
7 game of chess does not also force or oblige you to show certain manners or adhere to certain  
8  
9 etiquette.

10  
11 Searle and Millikan show that we need to distinguish between rules that define a given  
12  
13 social fact, say, the game of daxing, and such that subsequently will guide or prescribe *how to*  
14  
15 *behave while daxing*. The latter kind of rules is normative and not in the strict sense entailed  
16  
17 by constitutive rules, but has to be introduced separately. Constitutive rules *per se* are not  
18  
19 normative, but the fact that a given constitutive rule is *enforced in a certain way* embeds the  
20  
21 rule in normativity. How prescriptive rules or norms emerge is another issue, whether by  
22  
23 decree, habit, or tradition. Searle holds that in the case of arbitrary institutional facts, the  
24  
25 normative force of constitutive rules is derivative of a policy or regulation. In themselves,  
26  
27 institutional facts do not determine which norms follow from them. Any norm could be made  
28  
29 to agree with the facts. This is why there is a need for explicit policies.

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32 The following analysis of what it entails to misunderstand a constitutive rule as compared  
33  
34 to a social norm, explains the difference between constitutive rules and social norms in detail.  
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36 Let us introduce the following constitutive rule:  
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41 **(CR<sub>school teacher</sub>)** A person with background B <where B is a specification of the  
42  
43 required education, age, competence, etc.> counts as schoolteacher in England.

44  
45 The rule defines the concept of a teacher. Once there is a rule that does this job, we can use it  
46  
47 to appoint individual teachers, i.e., to classify individuals as schoolteachers. Now suppose that  
48  
49 the university diploma of a person who is working as a schoolteacher turns out to be a  
50  
51 forgery. Then, that person no longer will be considered a teacher, but lose the status function  
52  
53 that comes with the diploma (and probably his or her job too). Using fabricated diploma for  
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55 the purpose of passing as a schoolteacher and nominating an unqualified person both count as  
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3 violations of the constitutive rule. If a person acquires the function of a teacher without  
4 meeting the criteria, then the constitutive rule has *misfired*, or failed, and the appointment  
5 went wrong (Austin, 1975). Compare with the case when the violation concerns the social  
6 norms that regulate the import of the constitutive rule in real-life contexts. Suppose that a  
7 person has acquired the status function of a teacher by satisfying the criteria, but neglects a  
8 teacher's obligations (turns up late for school, is playing computer games during working  
9 hours, or does not teach what he or she is supposed to do). Then the social norms that regulate  
10 how a teacher ought to behave are *abused* (Austin, 1975), or misused. The person may be  
11 punished, but still will count as a teacher and retain that function. The consequences of  
12 abusing the norms that surround a given constitutive rule are quite different from those that  
13 result from failing to use the constitutive rule itself.  
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27 That constitutive rules and social norms are distinct means that a crucial step in the line of  
28 reasoning which bolsters the design of Rakoczy's and his colleagues' experiments is invalid.  
29 To repeat, the experiments are built around the constitutive rule for daxing. The adult declares  
30 that action A1 counts as daxing. Then, the puppet enters the scene and exclaims "I'm gonna  
31 dax now!", but performs another action than A1, that is to say, another action than the one  
32 that counts as daxing. Does the puppet's behaviour constitute a misfire or an abuse — a  
33 misunderstanding of the constitutive rule or violation of a social norm?  
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43 When the puppet performs *the wrong action*, i.e., another action than A1, the stipulated  
44 one, this is a case of misunderstanding, and the act *misfires*. The action will not count as  
45 daxing, because it does not meet the criteria for daxing. The puppet will not be daxing at all,  
46 and needs to be told that this is the case, and furthermore, merits an explanation of how to  
47 dax. However, when the puppet performs A1 but *in an irregular way*, e.g., while hiding for  
48 the other player or playing with its back to him or her, or is playing in a scary way or to hurt  
49 other players, this constitutes an *abuse*, a violation of the norms for daxing. Norms determine  
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3 how the action, once defined and created, ought to be implemented and applied in social  
4 contexts. How to apply the action of daxing is constrained by the policy of the game, e.g., that  
5 we play daxing together, play peacefully, etc. The puppet is daxing, but inappropriately, and  
6 so is blameworthy.  
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10  
11 Which is the correct interpretation of the data? Remember that, first, the puppet performs  
12 the wrong action, then, the children protest and try to correct the puppet. In view of the  
13 previous discussion, the children are reacting to the puppet's misunderstanding of the  
14 constitutive rule, i.e., what it means to dax. A *mistaken* action is based in error, not  
15 manipulation or misuse. Even if purposive, it is not blameworthy and does not deserve  
16 punishment. Accordingly, the children attempt to show the puppet what counts as daxing,  
17 viz., what constitutes daxing, and are not punishing the puppet. Utterances from the video-  
18 recordings confirm the present hypothesis; they say "You can't do that! It is wrong!" and "I'll  
19 show you, this is how you dax!"  
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32 I submit that the experiments do not demonstrate that the children think that the puppet is  
33 violating the norms for daxing, but that the puppet is not daxing at all. Given that Rakoczy has  
34 modelled the experiments on Searle's notion of a constitutive rule, it is not surprising that the  
35 experiments do not tell the whole story about how children understand social norms. This is  
36 not to contest that the experiments highlight a central aspect of human life — that constitutive  
37 rules are essential for having institutional facts. They show something about children's  
38 understanding of social life, which is in itself interesting and important: By 3 years, children  
39 have acquired the linguistic abilities necessary for understanding constitutive rules and  
40 creating institutional facts, and also appreciate the structure of codified rule games.  
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52 The criticism of earlier accounts of normative development for focussing on regulative  
53 rules appears misguided: To understand the development of social norms, it is not more  
54 appropriate to focus on constitutive than regulative rules. The two approaches sooner call for  
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3 integration. As argued above, constitutive rules acquire a normative dimension when they  
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5 occur with a set of commitments and obligations that prescribe how to apply or implement  
6  
7 them. Understanding the norms that regulate social interaction over time is as essential to  
8  
9 normativity and human life as understanding the constitutive rules that define what social  
10  
11 institutions and activities there are.  
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### 14 15 16 17 18 **The emergence of normativity in contexts of spontaneous play** 19

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22 Laboratory experiments do not constitute the only way to gain an understanding of the  
23  
24 development of normativity. Observational studies of children's spontaneous play in natural  
25  
26 settings can tell us a great deal. Thus, children's pretence games have names or descriptions  
27  
28 (Let's play Doctor! Let's play Family! Let's play Batman! Let's play Seek and find!) that  
29  
30 subsume the kind of activity that constitutes the game and assign certain roles and functions to  
31  
32 those who play it and the artefacts that appear in it (e.g., I'm the doctor! This is the scalpel!  
33  
34 You are the patient!). What individual actions are appropriate and permissible is determined  
35  
36 locally in the context of play. There is a major difference between pretence games and rule  
37  
38 games such as Monopoly, Poker, croquet, and football: The actions of pretence games such as  
39  
40 Doctor or Family are negotiable, but those that pertain to rule games in principle are not so.  
41  
42 For instance, you can play Doctor individually as well as socially, and make-up and change  
43  
44 the rules as you go along, whereas playing Monopoly requires following the codified rules  
45  
46 that define the game.  
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52 It is important to recognize that the concepts of a role (or function) and a rule are distinct.  
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54 Assigning somebody the role or function of Nurse or Doctor does not entail a determinate set  
55  
56 of rules. Paglieri's (2005) distinction between three types of play clarifies this issue. In  
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3 solitary play, the child assigns her or himself roles within a frame of make-believe, but sets  
4  
5 the boundaries of the game as the activity proceeds in real time. In social symbolic play, the  
6  
7 players explicitly co-create and negotiate their individual make-believe situations and specify  
8  
9 rules for how to proceed during the play. The rules are transient. Rule games, finally, rely on a  
10  
11 pre-codified system of rules that players must accept to play the game at all.  
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14 The fact that symbolic play relies on pretence and imagination reduces the importance of  
15  
16 codified rules for spontaneous play and the everyday normativity that it involves. Pretence is  
17  
18 pivotal to all symbolic play, solitary or social: The child pretends that an object is other than  
19  
20 what it really is, or that he or she is a different person than he or she really is (Sinha, 2009).  
21  
22 Imaginary cognitive and symbolic values are projected onto entities and relationships in the  
23  
24 immediate environment. The entities may be objects (the stick becomes a gun, the doll is  
25  
26 made to speak), social roles (mother, cowboy), and entire settings that contain both people  
27  
28 and artefacts.  
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32 Play episodes endure through time. In the process of symbolic play, the narrative is  
33  
34 continuously updated; as the storyline develops, new characters and artefacts appear and  
35  
36 others disappear (the gun becomes a sword, the doll a knight and then a witch). From early to  
37  
38 middle childhood, children elaborate skills for narrative structure and socio-dramatic play  
39  
40 (Sinha, 2009; cf. Piaget, 1962). They are not disposed to play rule games strictly, by enforcing  
41  
42 the rules, until in late childhood. Then it becomes a central concern to play in the  
43  
44 conventional way, by following the rules of the game and aspiring to win.  
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47 One reason why children do not focus on codified rules at a younger age may be that they  
48  
49 do not see the point in following rules strictly, but find it more useful and rewarding to adopt  
50  
51 the rules to the situation and constraints at hand, thus ensuring that the game goes on without  
52  
53 pauses or delay. Rakoczy et al. have shown that children understand that there are constitutive  
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55 rules that define fixed activities already by 3 years. Yet, observational studies suggest that  
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3 from an early age children prefer to engage both in solitary play and with peers in a more  
4 dynamic manner, expanding the activity in unforeseen ways. Thus, in a study of play among  
5 2- and 3-year-olds at two day-care centres, Alvestad (2012) reports that playing successfully  
6 demands that those sharing the play are prepared for negotiations about social relations, play  
7 materials, and the content of the play. Play from early to middle childhood is a situated  
8 activity that typically rewards fluency and elaboration of action instead of adequacy to  
9 standards and rules. Children practise reconstruction of on-going play in real time, responding  
10 to environmental challenges, or making room for new impressions and ideas.  
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20 Another reason why younger children do not play by the book may be that they do not  
21 automatically make the connection between constitutive rules and social norms. Although  
22 they recognize the function of constitutive rules, they do not understand that constitutive rules  
23 usually are accompanied by a policy that prescribes how to act and holds universally, for  
24 every player (Brinck, in press). This suggestion further illustrates the point made above, that  
25 there is a fundamental difference between constitutive rules and prescriptive norms. The  
26 former do not (conceptually) entail the latter, but you have to *learn* to appreciate the  
27 connection and its meaningfulness. For instance, the game of football does not merely  
28 comprise kicking a ball of a certain kind with your feet and legs and thereby getting it into the  
29 goal of the opposing team, but there also are regulations that prescribe how the game ought to  
30 be played and how the constitutive rules should be implemented. These regulations do not  
31 leave room for individual players to invent new ways of playing or adopt any manners they  
32 wish.  
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49 Children as old as 9 years do not consistently play rule games as prescribed, but sometimes  
50 behave as in social symbolic play. A study of children playing rule games in afterschool care  
51 shows that children who play in the absence of adults tend to change the prescribed rules to  
52 make the game more amenable and less complicated, and compensate for each player's  
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3 individual capacities and weaknesses (Harvard, in press). If they are uncertain about how to  
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5 go on or do not agree about it, they negotiate how to play and invent new rules together.  
6  
7 However, when one of the players is an adult, the tendency is to renounce the initiative, ask  
8  
9 the adult about the rules and then follow them without questioning. Adults who function as  
10  
11 authorities introduce another structure to the activity. By this age, children certainly are aware  
12  
13 that there is a prescribed manner of playing that players are supposed to follow, and the  
14  
15 presence of an authority seems to increase their motivation to comply. They expect adults to  
16  
17 take the role of an authority and maintain order. In contrast, when among peers, they feel free  
18  
19 to set the policy aside, and flexibly design the game in a way that suits everybody involved  
20  
21 and will maintain the interaction. That the game no longer corresponds to Monopoly does not  
22  
23 seem to matter to them.  
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27 The children in the study demonstrate strong cooperative and creative skills that are  
28  
29 inherently intersubjective. Harvard's observations suggest that reaching an agreement by  
30  
31 taking contextual factors into account is more central to children's play than are codes and  
32  
33 constitutive rules that once and for all lay down what to do and how to proceed. Dialogue and  
34  
35 negotiation contribute to solve emerging coordination problems, and solutions sometimes are  
36  
37 transitory, soon to be replaced by new agreements.  
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39

40 Winther-Lindqvist's (2009) observations of a group of 5-year-old kindergarten boys  
41  
42 playing football unsupervised by adults, point in the same direction. Winther-Lindqvist uses  
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44 Hughes' (1991) distinction between explicit game rules (i.e., constitutive rules), implicit rules  
45  
46 of the social context (i.e., social norms), and higher-order gaming rules ("rules for rules") to  
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48 analyse the structure of play. Rules for rules establish how, when, and why other rules should  
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50 be deployed. She reports that the local football rules that the boys actually were using, were  
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52 continuously re-negotiated. They were inspired by both the conventional game rules and  
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3 terminology and the boys' ideas about good behaviour, friendship, and justice, and sometimes  
4  
5 contradicted the conventional rules.  
6

7 A spontaneous play episode of three 5–6-year-old girls transcribed by Smolka et al. (1997)  
8  
9 and further discussed in Sinha and Rodriguez (2008), illustrates the equally collaborative and  
10  
11 creative character of social symbolic play. Roles and functions of the individuals change as  
12  
13 the interaction goes on to develop the narrative or solve problems that emerge in the  
14  
15 interaction. In the transcribed episode that Sinha and Rodriguez discuss, the children initially  
16  
17 are playing Family (one has the role of daughter, another the role of mother, the third girl does  
18  
19 not yet have a role). A hat falls of a shelf, one of the girls pick it up, and the hat, which is a  
20  
21 replica of a hat from a famous character in a theme park, becomes the centre of the new game  
22  
23 that spontaneously emerges and will involve all three girls. Sinha and Rodriguez stress that  
24  
25 social interaction is central to children's play, referring to a study by Oliviera (1998) to  
26  
27 substantiate their claim. Roles, identities, and conventions continually are re-negotiated  
28  
29 against the background of socially shared norms and representations (cf. Winther-Lindqvist,  
30  
31 2009). As Sinha and Rodriguez argue, social norms are not exclusively verbal, but subsist in  
32  
33 the material setting, in artefacts where conceptual and material structure blend (cf. Hutchins,  
34  
35 2005). Normativity is “materially instantiated in the artefactual objects that are most  
36  
37 frequently implicated in early triadic engagements” (Sinha, 2009, p. 167). Toys and other  
38  
39 artefacts are entrenched in a web of procedures or routines — nonverbal and verbal  
40  
41 interactions — that give them meaning. Children learn how to handle artefacts together with  
42  
43 others by socialisation from birth on (Rodriguez and Moro, 2008; Sinha, 2005), and  
44  
45 internalize norms for individual and joint action without reflection. Sørensen (2012) presents  
46  
47 a strategy that may be fruitful for clarifying how normativity is distributed across human  
48  
49 minds and bodies, material entities, activities, and technologies in space and for explaining its  
50  
51 development. It involves considering how normativity materializes in concrete contexts, and  
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3 permits comparison of different age groups. Sørensen approaches knowing (in the present  
4 case, of norms) as a spatial pattern that re-enacts an available infrastructure, and argues that  
5 knowing takes different spatial patterns in different practices and depending on the  
6  
7  
8 circumstances can be less or more distributed.  
9  
10

11 Social norms are transmitted and enacted in everyday activities. Normativity is part of the  
12 procedure. The following real life episode exemplifies how adults teach children to share and  
13 encourage them to solve problems together. At a birthday-party, 4-year old Albin is crying by  
14  
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16  
17  
18 5-year-old Tinas' model railroad because he does not know how to play with it. Tina is  
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20  
21 playing by herself, having a lot of fun. Then Albin's mother tells him to ask Tina how to play.  
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Thereby she both makes Albin stop crying and involves Tina with him in a way that will let  
him play too.

Another episode from the same setting illustrates how young children play with social  
norms, and test the limits for how far they can go in enforcing norms. One of the parents puts  
on some music and encourages both parents and children to dance. 5-year-old Emma tells her  
friend Eve and the adults around her that you have to warm up first and you cannot dance any  
way you like. She shows how to do the warm-up and explains for how long, then tells  
everybody to go through the procedure with her. The reactions Emma gets and the dialogue  
she engages in with Eve, her mother, and other adults makes it possible for her to assess her  
own authority and try out and test the strength of norms that she previously has encountered  
in other social contexts (at dance and aerobics classes).

In everyday life, social norms are far from codified rules, neither do they have the form of  
rules of obligation. Rather, social norms are dynamic and heterogeneous, apply to concrete  
situations and are tweaked to temporary conditions, guiding the interaction while it is  
unfolding. This raises a host of questions concerning compliance and conformity. How do  
young children perceive of conformity? In what ways, to what extent, and when do they start



1  
2  
3 to comply with norms and prescriptions? The remainder of the article traces compliance to  
4  
5 three sources: emotional engagement, nonverbal agreement, and conversation.  
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### 10 11 12 **The sources of compliance: Emotional engagement** 13

14  
15  
16 On the view advocated here, social norms are interaction patterns, grounded in  
17  
18 interpersonal relations. The primary relation is emotional engagement (cf. Reddy 2010a,  
19  
20 2010b). Emotional engagement that consists in the coordinated interaction of display of  
21  
22 primarily positive affect provides the desire and incentive for joint action and maintaining  
23  
24 interaction over time and also promotes the development of shared values. In the specific  
25  
26 form of interaffectivity, intersubjectivity constitutes the foundation of normativity and  
27  
28 prepares for compliance by motivating the agent to develop shared routines with close others,  
29  
30 routines that embody knowledge of how you ought to do and behave. Interaffectivity first  
31  
32 emerges via emotional contagion, and the infant soon develops skills for identifying and  
33  
34 sharing the emotions of self and other. Stern (1985, p. 132) describes interaffectivity as the  
35  
36 infant's matching his or her own "feeling state as experienced within" with the feeling state  
37  
38 "seen 'on' or 'in' another", which means that it involves emotional convergence. Stern  
39  
40 associates it with positive and negative attitude and evaluation. Importantly, the affective  
41  
42 communication that results from emotional engagement also changes the emotional  
43  
44 experiences and behaviour of the participants. Conceiving of affect and emotion as cross-  
45  
46 modal, embodied, and relational explains how affective communication may occur by  
47  
48 imitation, synchronization, and variation of facial expression, movement, posture, and  
49  
50 vocalisation. Active participation in interpersonal relations from birth on is integral to the  
51  
52 development of conventional social norms. In a longitudinal, cross-cultural study of  
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3 compliance with directives in the first year, Reddy et al. (2013) found that cooperation with  
4 requests develops from 6 months of age and is situationally embedded and based on practice.  
5  
6  
7 The study shows that normativity develops from shared routines when infant and adult  
8  
9 together create ways of doing things and manners of behaving relative to particular contexts,  
10  
11 and that learning to follow objective rules is marginal to early normative development. A  
12  
13 study of mother-infant dyads during diaper change presents a dynamic analysis of a similar  
14  
15 process (Rączaszek-Leonardi, Nomikou, and Rohlfing, 2013). The study describes how  
16  
17 regularities gradually arise from the interaction and constrain the way in which the next action  
18  
19 is to take place. These regularities cause expectations of specific behaviour that eventually  
20  
21 enable the emergence of routines and conventionalized forms of interaction.  
22  
23

24  
25 Reddy et al. (2013) emphasize the intense parental involvement in infant actions in the  
26  
27 second year. Over time, parents and infants push the routines they are creating in independent  
28  
29 directions, causing the expansion of learning what normativity is and how to deal with it as an  
30  
31 enlarging circle or spiral of forward movement. Normative development unfolds in time  
32  
33 because of joint effort. Reddy et al. suggest that directing and complying need to be  
34  
35 “redefined as continuous, emergent, and mutually enlarging rather than categorical and  
36  
37 separate phenomena” (p. 1760). They promote a different approach to normative development  
38  
39 than found in the experimental paradigm of Rakoczy and his colleagues, an approach that has  
40  
41 much in common with the one put forward here.  
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45  
46 I have stressed the motivating function of emotional engagement for normative  
47  
48 development. Rossano (2012) emphasizes that norms are connected to values and that values  
49  
50 first are experienced as emotions. He claims that the caregiver embodies social and cultural  
51  
52 values to which the infant becomes emotionally committed via early ritualized interaction.  
53  
54 The research on psychopathy shows that emotions are developmentally necessary for the  
55  
56 capacity for making moral judgments (Prinz, 2006, p. 31f.). Prinz (2006) argues that emotions  
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3 are sufficient for moral appraisal, say, for judging an action as wrong: We can form the belief  
4  
5 that something is morally wrong by simply having a negative emotion directed towards it.  
6  
7 Decety and Svetlova (2012) supply neuropsychological evidence that young children  
8  
9 understand the normative implications of emotions and that empathy has deep evolutionary  
10  
11 roots. They hold that empathy is necessary to perceive and respond appropriately to other  
12  
13 people's evaluative and normative attitudes, arguing that it depends on core mechanisms  
14  
15 associated with affective communication, social attachment, and parental care.  
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17

18  
19 Very likely, openness and respect for other people's preferences and the construction of a  
20  
21 normative framework of one's own build on processes that emerge very early in infancy in  
22  
23 interaction with others. Primary and secondary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen and Hubley,  
24  
25 1978; Trevarthen, 1979) and the relations and values that arise through emotional engagement  
26  
27 (or the lack of it) forge a person's normative profile from the first months in life and continue  
28  
29 to do so throughout life. Because social cognition is fundamentally different when we interact  
30  
31 with others as opposed to observe them or act on our own (Becchio, et al. 2010; Schilbach et  
32  
33 al., 2013), the quality and quantity of early exposure to intersubjectivity will have a profound  
34  
35 impact on future social functioning.  
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38  
39 From an early age, infants tend to engage with a number of people (e.g., relatives and  
40  
41 friends to the parents). Communication is not confined to the dyad but can include several  
42  
43 people at once (adults or infants) and involve multiple simultaneous engagements (Bradley  
44  
45 and Selby, 2004). As a consequence, infants participate in a variety of sometimes quite  
46  
47 complex forms of sense-making and learn that similar behaviour can acquire different senses  
48  
49 in different contexts and with different people.  
50  
51

52  
53 Infants' have a solid motivation to interact and *align* themselves with others and share  
54  
55 experiences (Carpenter, 2009; Carpenter and Liebal, 2011; Reddy, 2008). This motivation  
56  
57 constitutes an impetus towards conformity and expresses a *desire to be and do like others*,  
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2  
3 which surfaces in imitation games. Carpenter (2011; Over and Carpenter, 2013) draws  
4  
5 attention to the fact that imitation can convey mutuality and understanding, as a feeling of  
6  
7 pure sharing and togetherness, of being similar or of the same kind. In the present context, we  
8  
9 can *think of imitation as a display of conformity*.  
10

11  
12 In situations that involve teasing, imitation instead constitutes a way of testing boundaries  
13  
14 and norms for interaction (Reddy, 2000, 2003, 2008). Testing behaviour occurs when the  
15  
16 infant while oriented toward an imitating adult systematically modulates an object-directed  
17  
18 action to check whether the adult is following what the infant does and will copy the action  
19  
20 (Agnetta and Rochat, 2004). Keltner et al. (2001) define it as a playful provocation in which a  
21  
22 person comments on something relevant to the target of imitation. By 9 months, teasing  
23  
24 typically occurs in the reversal of newly mastered social gestures, e.g., request, or in actions  
25  
26 that are directly obstructive to the adult (Reddy, 2010b). Reddy explains how infants start to  
27  
28 play with social routines to test the limits already in the first year. For instance, they can  
29  
30 pretend to respond to a request for an object but then withdraw the object, repeatedly  
31  
32 throwing the toy back on the floor as soon as the parent has picked it up and handed it to the  
33  
34 child, or they show provocative noncompliance concerning actions that they know are  
35  
36 forbidden. Norm violation and conflict prompt teasing also in middle and late childhood  
37  
38 (Keltner et al., 2001). Teasing continues to be a strategy for learning about norms and  
39  
40 challenging boundaries throughout childhood and adolescence (Keltner et al., 1998).  
41  
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46 The primordial desire to be and do like others removes the need for rules of obligation in  
47  
48 the early development of normativity. According to Bicchieri (2006, p. 8), social norms are  
49  
50 not necessarily codified or supported by formal sanctions, and do not entail enforcement.  
51  
52 Rather, understanding social norms as rules of obligation presupposes understanding  
53  
54 ('perceiving') that others' expectations on one's own behaviour are legitimate expectations of  
55  
56 compliance (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 42). A person will feel an obligation to obey social norms and  
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2  
3 recognize their legitimacy when they become part of his or her system of values. —How do  
4  
5 social norms become part of a person's system of values? The present discussion suggests that  
6  
7 concern and engagement as implicated in interaffectivity motivate conformity in increasing  
8  
9 the subjects' willingness to comply with directives. Unless children feel that a given norm has  
10  
11 a bearing on what they are up to and it makes sense in their own framework, they will not be  
12  
13 motivated to act in accordance with it (Glüer and Wikforss, 2010); they may not even notice  
14  
15 or attend to it.  
16

17  
18 Studies on play in natural settings indicate that children do not primarily conceive of social  
19  
20 norms as rules of obligation in the strong, formal or codified sense that you obey no matter  
21  
22 what. As argued above, rules and norms provide guidance of action in a loose sense that  
23  
24 opens up for new behaviour. They are starting-points for a problem-solving activity that  
25  
26 occurs whenever on-going interaction breaks down and needs repair. Such activity also occurs  
27  
28 when children need to agree on the preliminaries for playing together, for instance, about  
29  
30 what game they will play, how roles and functions will be distributed, what actions are  
31  
32 relevant, and what props may be used. When the players feel that the rules they started out  
33  
34 with have outplayed their role, they change them. There are no limits for what direction a  
35  
36 game can take, as long as everybody is in.  
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#### 45 **The sources of compliance: Nonverbal agreement**

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49  
50 Many philosophers and social scientists hold that social norms and conventions are arbitrary  
51  
52 and involve some form of behavioural regularity towards which people orient themselves (cf.  
53  
54 Lewis, 1969). However, regularity may not be essential (Millikan, 2014). What matters is that  
55  
56 behaviour patterns reproduce, or repeat themselves regularly or not, and that there is  
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3 arbitrariness about the means by which the convention or norm fulfils its function in the sense  
4  
5 that there are alternative ways of reaching the same goal. The question remains what actually  
6  
7 causes people to orient themselves to and share a certain behaviour pattern, viz., to conform.  
8  
9  
10 Sinha (2009) suggests that social norms as negotiable and involve verbal or nonverbal  
11  
12 agreement, whether transitory or not, between two or more persons. Indeed, whereas  
13  
14 interaffectivity in the form of emotional engagement enables and motivates normativity  
15  
16 generally, agreement can explain how compliance is established and negotiated in the  
17  
18 individual case.  
19

20  
21 The notion of verbal agreement has an intuitive meaning in everyday talk. The notion of  
22  
23 nonverbal agreement, perhaps more central to development, is less straightforward. Pettit  
24  
25 (2002) explains it in terms of agents' nonverbal attitudes towards each other: Among a group  
26  
27 of people, mutual approval (or disapproval) of each other's behaviour turns a behaviour  
28  
29 pattern into a social norm, and lies behind the general conformity with the behaviour. Pettit  
30  
31 (2002, p. 280) describes people's attitudes towards each other as "involuntarily or  
32  
33 nonconsciously formed attitudes of esteem and inesteem". People are personally motivated to  
34  
35 conform because they are awarded by being thought well of and punished by being thought  
36  
37 badly of, and external sanctions are not necessary.  
38  
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40  
41 Emotional forms of reward and punishment are known to reinforce behaviour. Millikan  
42  
43 (2005, 2014) too explains conformity in terms of reward, making it clear that rewarding  
44  
45 behaviour reproduces without anyone's having to think about anyone else's thoughts:  
46  
47 "[P]eople repeat behaviours that have been successful in achieving wanted results" and "tend  
48  
49 to copy successful behaviour of others". Normativity involves the dynamic, interactive  
50  
51 coordination of behaviour, where emotion and affect in the guise of embodied perceivable  
52  
53 attitudes play a guiding role, sometimes on levels below conscious awareness.  
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3 Millikan's and Pettit's accounts differ from such that conceive of social norms as strict  
4  
5 rules of obligation the deviation from which motivates formal or institutionalised kinds of  
6  
7 punishment or reward. Whereas regulated formal sanctions intended to deter behaviour rarely  
8  
9 provide a strong personal motivation, one may be personally motivated to act in a certain way  
10  
11 by how people react to the self, especially if one has a close relation to these people (they may  
12  
13 be family members, friends, or co-workers). Motivation does not depend on reason, but can  
14  
15 be purely affective and implicit. Interestingly, implicit preferences for ingroups and dominant  
16  
17 groups that play a significant role for conformity emerge rapidly in young children and  
18  
19 remain stable across development (Dunham, Baron, and Banaji, 2008).  
20  
21

22  
23 In contrast to a view that appeals to emotion, Carpenter (2009) promotes a rational account  
24  
25 of the development of agreement in joint action that requires that each partner intends to  
26  
27 perform the joint action together "in accordance with and because of meshing subplans"  
28  
29 (Bratman, 1992, p. 338), and this needs to be common knowledge between the participants.  
30  
31 Joint action involves rational choices between action plans and presupposes an understanding  
32  
33 of other's intentions as genuine psychological, representational states. Carpenter (2009, p.  
34  
35 388) maintains that by 3 years, children begin to feel some of the commitments and  
36  
37 obligations inherent in joint action, as when they excuse themselves when they wish to leave a  
38  
39 joint action. She furthermore argues that 1-year-olds have the social-cognitive prerequisites  
40  
41 needed to participate in joint action, viz., basic understanding of others' goals and intentions  
42  
43 and common knowledge, and the ability and motivation to help others achieve their goals.  
44  
45

46  
47 Clearly, infants understand other's action goals and goal intentions and seem to agree  
48  
49 nonverbally. The question is if it is reasonable to explain these abilities in terms of complex  
50  
51 representational states. The philosophical theories that Carpenter (2009) relies on have been  
52  
53 developed to explain adult human cognition in quite complicated situations of choice and  
54  
55 decision-making, and there is no independent empirical evidence in support of using them to  
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3 explain infant behaviour or the early development of normativity. As Carpenter herself points  
4  
5 out, there are other, more parsimonious and less costly explanations (cf. Sebanz, Bekkering,  
6  
7 and Knoblich, 2006) that *prima facie* are just as plausible in the kind of situation Carpenter  
8  
9 considers.

10  
11 From a biological perspective, a bottom-up approach is preferable that focuses on how  
12  
13 basic processes work and how complex functions develop from simpler mechanisms. Like  
14  
15 evolutionary complexity, one may expect developmental complexity and specialisation to  
16  
17 arise over time as the result of the interaction between a variety of processes at lower levels  
18  
19 and shorter time-scales and via feedback from the environment (de Waal and Ferrari, 2010).  
20  
21 Cognitive capacities integrate a range of mechanisms, many of them shared across a number  
22  
23 of species. Consequently, it makes sense to search for the developmental sources of  
24  
25 conformity elsewhere than where rational accounts search.  
26  
27

28  
29 In line with this, Carpenter and Liebal (2011) present a lean account of common  
30  
31 knowledge in terms of states of knowing-together that arise by visual joint attention. Their  
32  
33 account is useful for explaining nonverbal agreement in terms of the sharing and exchange of  
34  
35 attitudes that underlie joint action in secondary intersubjectivity and, later, symbolic play.  
36  
37 According to Carpenter and Liebal, so-called sharing looks (by having eye contact) are  
38  
39 meaningful and communicate the fact that both agents share the experience of sharing (cf.  
40  
41 Hobson and Hobson, 2007), in short, that they are attending together. Such looks can be used  
42  
43 to establish a form of common knowledge that does not require higher-order intentions about  
44  
45 one's own and others' mental states. Sharing looks make it public that agents have the same  
46  
47 action goals in on-going joint activities such as social symbolic play. Because they wear their  
48  
49 message on the sleeve, they can contribute to establish local norms in the form of shared  
50  
51 behaviour patterns in on-going interaction. That people can perceive and act on each other's  
52  
53 mental states directly (cf. Gallagher, 2001, 2008) makes nonverbal agreement possible.  
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3 Whereas gaze expresses interest and goal-intention, facial expression of emotion  
4 communicates attitude and evaluation (Brinck, 2008; Reddy, 2008). Fundamentally, everyday  
5 interaction is sensory-motor and contextual, and people attune effortlessly to the meaningful  
6 perception of each other's emotion, attention, and intention in real time (Schilbach et al.,  
7  
8  
9  
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12 2008).

### 13 14 15 16 17 18 **The sources of compliance: Conversation** 19

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22  
23 Conscious concern and explicit emotional empathy surface in the second year of life. In a  
24 study that compared responses of infants to a distressed peer, Nichols et al. (2009) found that  
25 12-month-olds did not show interest or concern in the peer, 18-month-olds showed high levels  
26 of social interest whereas 24-month-olds showed greater empathy, concern, and pro-social  
27 responsiveness. By 2 years, self-awareness begins to develop that allows the child to take a  
28 normative attitude to the self as in shame. When she realizes she has not behaved as socially  
29 expected this causes her to experience shame. Shame relies on experiencing oneself through  
30 the eyes of others. By the middle of the second year, triadic exchanges take a new form and  
31 children begin to engage in active, explicit negotiation regarding the values of things co-  
32 experienced with others (Rochat, Passos-Ferreira, and Salem, 2009). Then children manifest a  
33 sense of *shared experience* that rests on complex on-going exchanges unfolding over time,  
34 and start to express secondary emotions such as embarrassment or guilt. Guilt and resentment  
35 signal that a public social norm has been established — that there is a set of shared  
36 expectations that the subjects together understand should be met (Bicchieri, 2006).  
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54 The question is to what extent secondary emotions depend on verbal skill. Sinha (2009)  
55 maintains that participatory engagements with adults in infancy and early childhood pave the  
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3 way for the folk psychological capacities that emerge in middle childhood, and thus for  
4  
5 grasping the normativity inherent in requesting, preferring, and inferring reasons. According  
6  
7 to Sinha, ascriptions of reasons for actions typically are simultaneously judgements of  
8  
9 normative validity and intelligibility that children hear from adults and older children when  
10  
11 participating in play and everyday activities. The conflation of (individual) reason with  
12  
13 (social) normativity in everyday talk (e.g., “She is running that way because she wants to  
14  
15 score a goal”) both constrains the space of possible reasons, and affords the child a first,  
16  
17 practical grasp of normativity.  
18  
19

20  
21 Gallagher and Hutto (2008) argue that children learn to judge an action’s social  
22  
23 appropriateness by engaging with narratives. Narratives involve a wide range of emotive and  
24  
25 interactive abilities and suggest how to create shared routines. Actually, the quality of parents’  
26  
27 talk about emotions with their toddlers has been shown to have significant impact on the  
28  
29 development of pro-social behaviour. Thus, Brownell et al. (2013) provide evidence that  
30  
31 parents’ discourse about others’ emotions with young children is an important socialization  
32  
33 mechanism. They report two studies on how parents’ reading picture books to their children  
34  
35 affects sharing in 18- and 24-month-olds, and instrumental and empathy-based helping in 18-  
36  
37 and 30-month-olds. The studies showed that children who helped and shared more quickly  
38  
39 and more often, especially in tasks that required complex emotion understanding, had parents  
40  
41 who more often asked them to label and explain the emotions depicted in the books. Parents’  
42  
43 elicitation of children’s talk about emotions was the strongest indicator of pro-social  
44  
45 behaviour.  
46  
47  
48

49  
50 In a longitudinal study of children aged 14 to 36 months, Rhee et al. (2013) report that  
51  
52 language skills have a specific role in the development of concern for others distinct from that  
53  
54 of general cognitive ability. They point out that conversation is important for learning to  
55  
56 identify a wide range of emotions and for the accurate interpretation of parents’ normative  
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3 reasoning. Conversation does not only give feedback on the appropriateness of the child's  
4  
5 own behaviour but also on his or her normative responses to others' actions. Hence, verbal  
6  
7 skills that are a prerequisite for conversation do play a significant role for developing rational  
8  
9 conformity, specifically, for having the words for mental states and normative attitudes and so  
10  
11 the means to learn how to conceptualize and reason about them in a way that can feed into  
12  
13 proper decision-making procedures. Moreover, language and the capacity to engage in  
14  
15 narratives seem crucial for eventually making sense of the idea that the self and others belong  
16  
17 to the same deontic universe, having similar duties and rights.  
18  
19

20  
21 Nevertheless, that social norms are anchored in interaffectivity and there is a continuous  
22  
23 negotiation of values in joint action suggest that normative understanding in many cases  
24  
25 consists in a pragmatic ability to act appropriately in particular situations (cf. de Jaegher, di  
26  
27 Paolo, and Gallagher, 2010; Hodges, 2014). To act appropriately means to behave as expected  
28  
29 but also to be productive, or behave in a way that maintains the interaction by advancing it,  
30  
31 even if this sometimes means to diverge. Normativity is a practical skill also in adults that  
32  
33 often does not require verbalising reasons for action. Hence it seems more correct to think of  
34  
35 the understanding of social norms as emerging from processes such as participatory sense-  
36  
37 making (de Jaegher and di Paolo, 2007) or participatory engagement (Sinha and Rodriguez,  
38  
39 2008) than from the declarative speech acts that lie behind constitutive rules.  
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43 In social cognition, the emphasis lies on the relation — concerning normativity, on how  
44  
45 norms are co-constructed and given content in and through on-going interaction.  
46  
47 Meaningfulness arises in practical engagement (cf. Rączaszek-Leonardi, Nomikou, and  
48  
49 Rohlfing, 2013). Yet, verbal skills doubtlessly help to identify the mental states that are  
50  
51 involved in normativity and discern their socially accepted, public function in institutional  
52  
53 contexts. Narratives are instrumental for making sense of and justifying actions in retrospect  
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3 and for the verbal negotiation of ongoing and future joint actions. Moreover, conversation  
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5 grants social norms both a history and afterlife.  
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