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Do People Value Plants Over Non-Living Entities? Moral Considerations in Adults and Young Children

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Abstract

Is it more wrong to harm a plant than a rock? Little is known about the development of our moral consideration for plants—alive but not typically seen as having human-like minds. This study examined whether adults (N=153) and young children (pilot N=17) tend to value plants over non-living things. Participants watched a video of a plant restorer caring for a plant but knocking down a bucket and a plant harmer caring for a bucket but knocking down a plant. The proportion of adults who disliked or distrusted the plant harmer, and identified them as the bad guy—compared to the plant restorer—was significantly greater than chance (ps<.001). Additionally, participants judged harming the plant more severely than harming the bucket (p<.001). Although children judged harming the plant and bucket as similarly wrong, 65% of them liked the plant restorer more. After completing data collection, we will examine developmental differences.

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