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# Children disassociate from antisocial in-group members

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### ABSTRACT

Extensive research has demonstrated that children show a robust in-group bias and, concurrently, are highly attuned to the prosocial and antisocial behavior of others. The limited research investigating the capacity for antisocial behavior to attenuate children's in-group bias has, however, returned mixed findings. Moreover, no research has examined how this might interact with perceived group permeability. Thus, the current study aimed to provide a more complete understanding of the relationship between in-group bias and antisocial behavior, how this interacts with perceptions of out-group behavior, and how group context (permeability) influences these responses. Children at age 4 and 5 years and age 7 and 8 years were assigned to a group randomly or based on their performance of a task. They then watched videos of in-groups and out-groups behaving prosocially and antisocially, in differing combinations, with the key experimental conditions focusing on an antisocial in-group paired with either a prosocial or antisocial out-group. In-group preference was then determined using liking ratings, resource allocation, and perceived similarity to the in-group. For older children, but not younger children, antisocial behavior, but not group permeability, was found to attenuate in-group bias for measures of liking and association. Interestingly, no effect was identified for children's own resource allocation behavior. This indicates that although there is a robust effect of antisocial behavior on in-group judgments, it does not extend so far as to influence children to behave antisocially themselves.

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## Introduction

As ultrasocial creatures (Tomasello, 2014), humans interact with others in prolific and information-filled ways. Our limited capacity for processing dictates that we are required to be discerning in our interactions—not only in terms of what information we should consider but also in terms of who is giving us this information. One social bias that both adults and children appear innately subject to is an in-group bias—a tendency to prefer those we are similar to or affiliated with (Tajfel, 1970). According to social identity theory (SIT), our social identities are derived from our group membership; by identifying with a group, we develop a sense of belonging that forms part of our identity.

The positive associations of in-group membership (Greenaway et al., 2015; Haslam, Cruwys, Milne, Kan, & Haslam, 2016; Jetten et al., 2015) lead to in-group preferences in both adults and children (Everett & Faber, 2015; McGlothlin & Killen, 2006; Sherif, 1961; Tajfel, 1970). In children, there is extensive evidence to support this bias across many psychological paradigms (Buttelmann, Zmyj, Daum, & Carpenter, 2013; Dunham, Baron, & Carey, 2011; Howard, Henderson, Carrazza, & Woodward, 2015; Kinzler, Corriveau, & Harris, 2011; Sherif, 1961; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), using both naturalistic (Howard et al., 2015; Kinzler et al., 2011) and minimal (Dunham et al., 2011) group methods. However, this in-group preference can lead to relatively lower perceptions of out-groups (Aboud, 2003), with research showing that children even perceive less humanness in out-group faces compared with in-group faces (McLoughlin, Tipper, & Over, 2017). In line with this, children have been shown to prefer their in-group over an out-group in a range of different domains, including liking and prosocial tendencies, as social learning models (Buttelmann et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2015; Kinzler et al., 2011), and they will even go so far as to distort information to preserve a positive image of their in-group (Dunham et al., 2011).

Prosocial behavior is another social cue that is salient to young children. From early in development, children prefer prosocial individuals over antisocial individuals and, moreover, judge actions based on intention rather than on outcome (Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2010). This preference for prosocial behavior is reflected in children's own prosocial tendencies as well. By the middle of their 4th year of life, children prefer to allocate resources to those who have shared previously (Kenward & Dahl, 2011; Olson & Spelke, 2008) and will vary their rates of sharing based on an agent's previous sharing behavior with them (Warneken & Tomasello, 2013). Importantly, these social concerns extend to third parties as well. From around 3 years of age, children will personally intervene when a third party is being treated immorally (Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011) and will punish perpetrators for taking objects that belong to someone else (Riedl, Jensen, Call, & Tomasello, 2015). Finally, by 6 years of age, children are even willing to incur a personal cost to punish third-party injustices (McAuliffe, Jordan, & Warneken, 2015).

The literature has consistently demonstrated the robustness of children's in-group preferences as well as the saliency of prosocial behavior. These biases tend to complement one another, with research demonstrating that children consistently both treat and perceive in-groups more positively. From 12 months of age infants prefer to play with in-groups (Mahajan & Wynn, 2012), and by the middle of their 4th year children will behave more prosocially toward them—preferentially providing resources to in-group members over out-group members when there are insufficient resources to allow for equal allocation (Olson & Spelke, 2008). By 5 years of age, children will go so far as to distort information and preferentially encode positive information about in-groups relative to out-groups (Dunham et al., 2011).

Despite the rich literature on these topics, limited research has investigated how and when children might react when these factors are discordant. One study has shown that children accept responsibility for negative actions of their in-group (Over, Vaish, & Tomasello, 2016). A number of studies have also examined how children respond to in-group deviancy (Rutland, Killen, & Abrams, 2010), demonstrating that although deviancy from social norms is generally rejected, allowances are made for prosocial behavior. In particular, children will support a group member who violates an unfair group norm (i.e., by refusing to share unevenly) but will reject a group member who violates a fair group norm (i.e., by refusing to share evenly) (Cooley & Killen, 2015; Hitti, Mulvey, Rutland, Abrams, & Killen, 2014; Mulvey, Hitti, Rutland, Abrams, & Killen, 2014; Rutland, Hitti, Mulvey,

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