

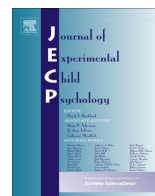


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How do young children expect others to address resource inequalities between groups?



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ABSTRACT

Age-related changes in young children's expectations for others' resource allocation decisions were investigated. Children ages 3 to 6 years ($N = 80$) were introduced to an inequality of resources between two groups. Participants gave their expectations for (a) how a member of the group with more resources (advantaged group) and a member of the group with fewer resources (disadvantaged group) would evaluate the inequality (okay or not okay), (b) which group each of the two individuals would prefer (ingroup or outgroup), and (c) how each of the two individuals would allocate subsequent resources between the groups. Findings revealed children's differing expectations for how others would address resource inequalities based on group status. Children expected that if the disadvantaged group member evaluated the inequality negatively then he or she would reduce the disparity. But children expected that if the advantaged group member evaluated the inequality positively then he or she would increase the disparity. Furthermore, 5- and 6-year-olds, but not 3- and 4-year-olds, expected individuals to seek more for their ingroup if they preferred their ingroup over the outgroup. Different from previous research on children's own resource allocation decisions, these findings reveal the circumstances under which children expect others to perpetuate or attenuate resource inequalities between groups.

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Introduction

Children's expectations for how others will address resource disparities between groups reflect their developing understanding of inequality. Because inequality during childhood contributes to the cycle of exclusion that continues through adulthood, whereby some social groups experience restricted access to resources (Abrams & Killen, 2014; Brown & Bigler, 2005), it is important to understand children's perspectives on others' allocation decisions. Resource allocation decisions are complex; multiple factors contribute to decision making in distributive contexts. Moreover, children's developing expectations for how others will respond to a resource inequality sheds light on their awareness of who might be expected to reinforce an unequal status quo and who might be expected to rectify a resource disparity. The current study examined young children's expectations for others' resource allocation decisions in the context of a preexisting resource inequality between groups.

Past research has largely focused on children's own resource allocation behavior rather than expectations for how others might address inequality. This work has demonstrated that, from as early as the preschool years, children strongly prefer equal allocation of resources (e.g., Cooley & Killen, 2015; Warneken, Lohse, Melis, & Tomasello, 2011) yet sometimes give priority to members of their own group when making allocation decisions (e.g., Dunham, Baron, & Carey, 2011; Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008; Renno & Shutts, 2015). Although the tension between fairness considerations and ingroup biases in children's own allocation decisions is important, little is known about whether children expect others' behavior to be guided by these same considerations.

In a broad sense, such expectations could reflect some of the early origins of children's understanding of how resources move through social systems (Arsenio, 2015; Wainryb & Recchia, 2014). Evidence that children recognize the roles of fairness considerations, ingroup preferences, and group status differences in others' allocation decisions would reflect part of their developing understanding of how individuals within groups seek to perpetuate or attenuate group-based inequalities. As they gain experience as members of groups, children increasingly recognize that groups are defined by the norms that they hold (Abrams & Rutland, 2008). Yet in the context of resource allocation, very little research has investigated what children expect these norms to be.

One possibility is that young children may expect others to allocate more resources to their social ingroup, as considerable research demonstrates that children themselves consider affiliations with social groups when allocating resources (Dunham et al., 2011; Moore, 2009; Olson & Spelke, 2008; Renno & Shutts, 2015). But in a context of group-based inequality, another possibility is that children may expect others to adhere to principles of equality or seek to correct the disparity by giving more to the group with less. Many studies show that children value these fairness issues when making their own allocation decisions (Baumard, Mascaró, & Chevallier, 2012; Fehr et al., 2008; Shaw & Olson, 2012; Warneken et al., 2011). Concern for equality in resource allocation, for example, may even emerge during infancy (e.g., Geraci & Surian, 2011; Sloane, Baillargeon, & Premack, 2012; Sommerville, Schmidt, Yun, & Burns, 2013), highlighting children's strong concern for fairness in distributive contexts.

A third possibility is that older preschoolers may recognize the coexistence of both concerns in others' resource allocation behavior. This was the prediction tested in the current study. Recent work has demonstrated that many considerations, including concerns for group cohesion and ensuring fair distribution, coexist in children's own resource allocation decisions from as early as the preschool years (see Killen, Elenbaas, Rizzo, & Rutland, *in press* for a review). In fact, some research suggests that, in a complex social context like intergroup resource allocation, older children may recognize that others weigh multiple considerations when making allocation decisions (Killen & Rutland, 2011). In a context of preexisting inequality, such considerations may include an interest in correcting the group-based resource disparity as well as promoting the interests of the ingroup. Unique from research on children's own grappling with competing concerns, such evidence would shed light on early understanding that others may have differing perspectives about how to address resource inequality between groups (and perhaps these perspectives diverge based on the groups' advantaged or disadvantaged status).

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