



## Original Article

## Parochialism in preschool boys' resource allocation

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## ABSTRACT

Humans' social interactions are characterized by a tension between individual-regarding preferences—such as others' subjective preferences—and group-regarding preferences—such as others' group membership. Using the dictator game, we demonstrate that this tension characterizes even preschool children's distributive behavior, and that it patterns differently across development and genders. Study 1 contrasted ownership of the resource (mine/ours/not mine) with recipients' minimal group membership (in-group/out-group). We found that only boys generated biased distributions favoring the in-group, and preserved common resources as if they were their own. Study 2 revealed that upon learning of recipients' personal preferences (like/doesn't like resource), boys and girls complied with in-group members' preferences, but only boys also manifested a behavior that opposed out-group members' preferences. The early emergence of a balance between individual- and group-regarding preferences sheds light on the origins of parochialism, and its gender selectivity is consistent with evolutionary accounts of the origins of group cognition in humans.

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## 1. Introduction

Evolutionary biologists note a basic tension between two broad construals underlying human interactions with others. On the one hand, humans can conceive of themselves and others as distinct *individual* agents striving for survival ('Me' and 'You'). Thus, based on inferences about one's or others' self-interests and preferences, humans may compete fiercely over resources and mates, but may also act in altruistic manners, paying personal cost to increase the welfare of specific others. On the other hand, humans' survival has for long been dependent on functioning within collaborative social groups, which were critical for ensuring sustenance and protection. As such, humans are arguably unique in their ability to be group-minded (Greene, 2014; Tomasello & Vaish, 2013)—that is, capable of thinking of one-self and others not only as discrete individuals, but as members of groups with which one is either affiliated ('Us') or not ('Them'). In fact, construing interacting agents in terms of group membership may on occasion override the construal of such agents as individuals. For instance, there may be situations in which cooperation with in-group members for the benefit of the group overtakes one's self-interests ('Us' ahead of 'Me'), and situations in which in-group interests promote hostility towards out-group members ('Us' ahead of 'Them')—two hallmarks of "parochialism" (De Waal, 2008; Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, & Fehr, 2003; Price, Cosmides, & Tooby, 2002).

Developmental studies reveal that from a young age children can adjust their behavior to match others' individual desires, intentions, or

preferences (e.g., Repacholi & Gopnik, 1997; Warneken & Tomasello, 2009). Moreover, by kindergarten-age, children hold rich concepts and biased attitudes regarding social groups (e.g., Deeb, Segall, Birnbaum, Ben-Eliyahu, & Diesendruck, 2011; Dunham, Baron, & Carey, 2011). Clearly, then, the capacity to regard the preferences of individuals, and those of a group, is available already prior to school entry. The main goal of the present study was to assess how young children solve situations in which these two alternative construals of others—referred to as individual- and group-regarding preferences—clash. In particular, we assessed situations that required children to make a behavioral decision, namely how to distribute resources, based on either of these two preferences.

## 1.1. Individual- and group-regarding preferences in resource distribution

Among adults, behavioral distribution tasks have been commonly used to assess participants' underlying motivations (e.g., other-regarding preferences such as altruism, spite, intention-based reciprocity, guilt or inequality aversion; Fehr, Glätzle-Rützler, & Sutter, 2013; Fehr & Schmidt, 2006). For example, using the 'Dictator game', studies have examined how adults distribute resources between themselves and a recipient in one-shot unreciprocated interactions. Importantly for the present purposes, these studies have found that accentuating the "individual" vs. "group" aspects of participants led to different distribution patterns. For instance, emphasizing the individual attributes of the 'dictator' (e.g., entitlement, intentionality) or of the recipient (e.g., 'deserving' or 'wealthy'), affected adults' allocation (Blount, 1995; Bohnet & Frey, 1999; Engel, 2011; Falk, Fehr, & Fischbacher, 2008; Hoffman, McCabe, Shachat, & Smith, 1994). Orthogonally, manipulations of the group membership of recipients (Chen & Xin, 2009), or of the ownership of the resources (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003), also

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impacted adults' distribution. By and large, adults distribute more resources to in- than out-group recipients, and even apply altruistic punishment in order to preserve group resources.

The past few years has seen a surge of developmental studies on resource distribution. Infants already seem to hold an expectation that resources will be distributed fairly between recipients, as measured in their looking-time to equal vs. unequal distribution events (Geraci & Surian, 2011; Schmidt & Sommerville, 2011; Sloane, Baillargeon, & Premack, 2012). As they mature, children manifest more nuanced patterns of expectations and evaluations that also affect their own distributive behavior (Shaw, DeScioli, & Olson, 2012). These nuances can in fact be conceptualized also in terms of the extent to which children are sensitive to individual- vs. group-regarding preferences. Specifically, the child's self-interest is dominant among 3- to 4-year olds across cultures (Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008; Rochat et al., 2009), as well as among 5-year olds, who prefer to maintain their relative advantage over another individual, even at a personal cost (Sheskin, Bloom, & Wynn, 2014). Moreover, information about individual others, such as animacy (Castelli, Massaro, Sanfey, & Marchetti, 2010), previous history of reciprocity (House, Henrich, Sarnecka, & Silk, 2013) or collaboration (Hamann, Warneken, Greenberg, & Tomasello, 2011), also impact children's distribution behavior.

At the same time, young children are also sensitive to group aspects of distribution contexts. For instance, 3- and 4-year olds manifested biased distributions in favor of their gender-group (Dunham et al., 2011), 5-year olds distributed more resources towards an anonymous recipient when they were watched by in-group members (but not when watched by out-group ones) (Engelmann, Over, Herrmann, & Tomasello, 2013; see also Shaw et al., 2014), and 6- to 8-year olds distributed more positive stimuli to an in-group member and more negative stimuli to an out-group member, manifesting what Buttelmann & Bohm (2014), labeled 'in-group love' and 'out-group hate', respectively.

Crucially, in the developmental studies reviewed above, children did not have to choose *between* individual- versus group-regarding preferences. Consequently, their behaviors revealed sensitivity to whichever preference was available. Here we present children with a systematic conflict between individual- and group-regarding preferences, thus emulating complex everyday interactions. Our goals were to evaluate whether children's allocation rates vary according to these distinct concerns, and to trace the development of their allocation patterns.

## 1.2. Gender

Interestingly, some gender differences have been found in distributive tasks among children. In particular, 7- and 8-year-old boys have been found to have stronger parochial tendencies than girls, e.g., favoring more their in-group and even harming the out-group (Buttelmann & Bohm, 2014; Fehr et al., 2008). One possible account of such gender differences has to do with the different socialization processes young Western children undergo (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). In particular, from early on, boys are arguably encouraged to participate in competitive large group interactions, and girls in empathic intimate ones.

Alternatively, these gender differences also resonate with evolutionary accounts arguing that males might be more sensitive than females to group-regarding aspects (Geary, Byrd-Craven, Hoard, Vigil, & Numtee, 2003; McDonald, Navarrete, & Van Vugt, 2012; Navarrete, McDonald, Molina, & Sidanius, 2010; Tooby & Cosmides, 1988). Specifically, the evolutionary argument is that males have been the ones most likely to benefit from expanding their mating circle across groups, and were—and still are—the most vested in intergroup conflict (McDonald et al., 2012; Van Vugt, De Cremer, & Janssen, 2007). Females, in turn, were more focused on the proximate individuals serving as potential mates, and in cooperation within their immediate social circle (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Navarrete et al., 2010). Following these

characterizations, parochialism has been hypothesized to be a particularly male trait.

Based on these claims, we pose an additional research question; namely, whether reliance upon individual- and group-regarding preferences differs across genders at younger ages than previously reported.

## 1.3. The present studies

Overall, the current research targets two main questions. First, how 3- to 6-year-old children balance between individual- and group-regarding preferences, when both are available simultaneously? And second, does the possible interaction between these preferences differ across age and genders?

In two different studies using Dictator Games, we pitted against each other variables that represent individual- and group-regarding preferences. Specifically, study 1 juxtaposed recipients' *group membership* (in-group, out-group) with different *ownership* conditions of the resources to be distributed. Specifically, one condition enhanced the dictator's personal interest (mine condition), a second condition was aimed at decreasing the personal interest of the dictator (not mine), and a third condition, in which the resource was described as belonging to the entire kindergarten (ours), allowed the dictator to manifest sheer consideration of the group's interest. This latter condition is of particular theoretical importance because it emulates one of the most common functions of intergroup conflict, namely, protecting and increasing common resources. In all ownership conditions, it was made clear to children that they were free to distribute as many of the resources to the anonymous recipient as they wished.

In study 2, the clash between individual- and group-regarding preferences was operationalized by forcing participants to consider the two alternatives with regard to the same recipient. In particular, study 2 depicted recipients both, as exemplars of a group—i.e., manipulating *group membership* as in study 1—as well as individuals—i.e., by telling participants about the *recipient's individual preference* regarding the to-be allocated resource (like, and does not like the resource).

## Study 1: ownership and group membership

### 2. Method

#### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 235 3–6 years old ( $M = 5$ ,  $SD = 11$  months; 46% girls), divided into 141 3–4 year-olds ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 6$  months; 47% girls) and 87 5–6 year-olds ( $M = 6$ ,  $SD = 5$  months; 45% girls). The younger children were recruited from several pre-kindergartens, and the older children from several kindergartens, all in the same Israeli city. Participants were from an average SES background, and all had signed parental permission to participate. Seven children were excluded for various reasons (e.g., procedure interrupted by the teacher, child failed to count stickers, child quit in the middle).

#### 2.2. Procedure

Children played the dictator game individually in a quiet room, with 10 different stickers as allocation resources. In order to avoid a possible confounding effect of sticker "attractiveness" (Blake & Rand, 2010), we used stickers that were moderately attractive, as determined in a pre-test with a separate sample of children (matched per age and gender) (see Supplementary Information #1).

The experimenter, who was present for the entire procedure, started by explaining to children that there are two groups in the "stickers game" that they will be playing—the 'blue' group and the 'yellow' one. Children were randomly assigned to one of these novel and arbitrary color-groups by having 3 color-matched stickers affixed to

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