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The role of personal values in children's costly sharing and non-costly giving

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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether children's values, global and abstract motivations serving as guiding principles, are organized similarly to those of adults, whether values can predict individual differences in children's sharing behaviors, and whether the normative nature of the situation influences the expression of these individual differences. Children ($N = 243$, ages 5–12 years) participated in a values ranking task as part of a visit to a science museum. The majority of children ($n = 150$) also participated in a task examining costly sharing (i.e., sharing that results in giving up part of one's own resources) and non-costly giving (i.e., giving that does not influence one's own share). Starting from 5 years of age, children showed a structure of values similar to that of adolescents and adults, specifically contrasting preferences for opposing values (i.e., self-transcendence with self-enhancement and openness to change with conservation). Importance given to self-transcendence values related positively to costly sharing but not to non-costly giving, indicating that in situations where it is more normative to share, individual differences in values are less expressed in children's actual sharing. In addition, children's sex and age moderated the relation between values and behavior. Children's values are an important aspect of their developing personalities. Taking them into consideration can greatly promote the research of prosocial and normative development as well as our understanding of individual differences in children's behavior.

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Introduction

Sharing is not easy. It usually comes with some cost to the individual and carries with it an inherent dilemma between conflicting motivations (Davidov, Vaish, Knafo-Noam, & Hastings, 2016; de Waal, 2008; Eisenberg-Berg & Hand, 1979). For example, a child facing a possibility to share treats with another child could be motivated by the wish to be kind or the will to behave according to social norms and, at the same time, could be driven by the conflicting motivation to enjoy the treats. Besides personal motivations, this child would also need to consider how others expect him or her to behave and the norms of the situation. Children's sharing may reflect individual differences in their motivations to act prosocially. Therefore, we sought to examine whether children's values, a global and trans-situational set of motivations, predict their decisions in sharing dilemmas. We tested children in two types of dilemmas that differ in the normative expectations they elicit to examine whether normativity can influence the expression of individual differences in sharing.

Development of children's values

Values are abstract desirable goals that vary in importance across individuals, serve as guiding principles across situations, and underlie actions (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, 2012). Thus, individuals' values provide a set of personal norms, that is, personal expectations or obligations that dictate worldview-compatible actions (Schwartz, 1977; Schwartz & Fleishman, 1978). Many empirical studies guided by Schwartz's theory have found, in various cultures, a set of 10 broad values representing distinct motivational goals. These 10 values can be arranged in two orthogonal dimensions: (a) self-transcendence versus self-enhancement values, which contrast the focus on tolerance and concern for others (universalism and benevolence) with emphasis on personal success and dominance (power and achievement), and (b) openness to change versus conservation values, which contrast the emphasis on openness to new ideas and actions (stimulation and self-direction) with the will to avoid change (tradition, conformity, and security). Hedonism shares aspects of both openness to change and self-enhancement values (Schwartz, 1992) (see Fig. 1 for a graphic presentation and detailed explanation on each value).

When do children form their own personal values? Until recently, it has been thought that this process occurs during adolescence (e.g., Barni, Ranieri, Scabini, & Rosnati, 2011; Knafo & Schwartz, 2004). Recently, however, this notion has been challenged, partly thanks to a new measurement tool, the Picture-Based Value Survey for Children (PBVS-C; Döring, Blauensteiner, Aryus, Drögekamp, & Bilsky, 2010). This instrument presents children with caption-accompanied pictures of a protagonist child performing actions representing each of the 10 values. Using this instrument, children are able to report their values in relatively concrete terms that do not require high abstraction abilities (Döring et al., 2015).

Studies using the PBVS-C revealed that even at 7 years of age, children display a meaningful conception of values. Children gave similar rankings to values from the same higher-order dimension (e.g., benevolence, universalism) and gave different rankings to values from opposing dimensions (e.g., benevolence, power) (Ciecuch, Davidov, & Algesheimer, 2016; Döring et al., 2015; Uzevovskiy, Döring, & Knafo-Noam, 2016). Furthermore, from 8 years of age and over, children showed stability in their values preference over a period of 2 years, which was similar in its magnitude to the stability reported for children's personality traits (Ciecuch et al., 2016). Studies that used different methods than the PBVS-C revealed that 4- to 6-year-olds' values preferences can be classified according to the four higher-order dimensions (Ciecuch, Hulak, Kitaj, Leszczyńska, & Bulkowska, 2011) and that most children from 5 years of age and over show consistency in their preferences of values when these are presented with different items (Collins, Lee, Sneddon, & Döring, 2017).

To hold a value system, children first need to have a basic sense of self on which they can report to others. That is, they should be able to relate internal states, such as needs, thoughts, and preferences, as their own (Harter, 2006). This ability emerges during early childhood, with 3- and 4-year-olds being able to construct concrete cognitive representations of observable features of the self such as abilities, physical attributes, and emotions (Harter, 2006). As early as 4 or 5 years of age, children can report on

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