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## I won't tell: Young children show loyalty to their group by keeping group secrets

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### ABSTRACT

Group loyalty is highly valued. However, little is known about young children's loyal behavior. This study tested whether 4- and 5-year-olds ( $N = 96$ ) remain loyal to their group even when betraying it would be materially advantageous. Children and four puppets were allocated to novel groups. Two of these puppets (either in-group or out-group members) then told children a group secret and urged them not to disclose the secret. Another puppet (not assigned to either group) then bribed children with stickers to tell the secret. Across ages, children were significantly less likely to reveal the secret in the in-group condition than in the out-group condition. Thus, even young children are willing to pay a cost to be loyal to their group.

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### Introduction

Across human cultures, loyalty is highly valued (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). We expect our group members to stick with the group and to be trustworthy in their dealings with fellow in-group members (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Individuals who abandon or betray their group are often punished harshly. In times of war deserters can be executed, and even in times of peace defectors are judged very negatively by their group members (e.g., Singer & Radloff, 1963). One particularly reprehensible offense is

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betraying the secrets of one's group to an out-group. Traitors and spies are held in contempt by group members and often punished harshly as well.

Why is loyalty so important to us? Living in groups has been critical to humans' success. Only by cooperating with others have we been able to survive and flourish (Boyd & Richerson, 2009; Roberts, 2005). For cooperation to be stable and successful, group members must be able to trust and rely on each other over time (Tomasello, Melis, Tennie, Wyman, & Herrmann, 2012). Loyalty is particularly valued in situations where defection or betrayal would harm the group but would be advantageous for the individual (e.g., Levine & Moreland, 2002; Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001). Consequently, group members are often expected to sacrifice personal benefits for the good of the group as a whole (Brewer & Silver, 2000). It is this personal sacrifice that puts an individual's loyalty to the test and makes it visible in its strongest form.

Kindergarten age is known to be an important period for the development of group-related attitudes and behavior. For example, a number of studies have found that children around this age have reliable preferences for their in-group over out-group members (e.g., Aboud, 2003; Bigler & Liben, 1993; Dunham, Baron, & Carey, 2011; Dunham & Emory, 2014; Kinzler & Spelke, 2011). From around 4 years of age, group membership has also been found to influence children's learning (Kinzler, Corriveau, & Harris, 2011) and motivation (Master & Walton, 2013), and to guide their expectations and judgments about other people's behavior (Chalik & Rhodes, 2014; Rhodes & Chalik, 2013). Further research suggests that school-aged children are willing to give up resources for their group members. For example, Fehr, Bernhard, and Rockenbach (2008) found that 7- and 8-year-olds are more likely to share a resource with an in-group member than an out-group member, whereas other research indicates that by 6 years of age children are more willing to engage in costly punishment on behalf of in-group members than out-group members (Jordan, McAuliffe, & Warneken, 2014). Yet, to our knowledge, there have been no studies demonstrating that young children show loyalty to their group by making personal sacrifices for the sake of the group.

The majority of research on this topic has investigated how children evaluate the loyal or disloyal behavior of others rather than their own sense of loyalty to the group. In these studies, loyalty is typically defined as preferentially interacting with, or saying positive things about, in-group members. For example, Castelli, De Amicis, and Sherman (2007) found that White children between 4 and 7 years of age favor other White children who positively interact with a racial in-group member (i.e., a White child) over White children who interact with a racial out-group member (i.e., a Black child). Another set of studies investigated children's judgments of in-group and out-group peers who expressed normative versus deviant statements (e.g., saying positive things about their in-group only versus also saying positive things about their out-group, respectively). These studies found that 5- to 12-year-olds generally preferred normative to deviant in-group members (e.g., Abrams, Rutland, & Cameron, 2003; Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Ferrell, 2007; Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, & Ferrell, 2009).

The only study that has investigated whether children positively evaluate individuals who pay a cost in order to remain loyal to the group was conducted by Misch, Over, and Carpenter (2014). In their study, 4- and 5-year-olds watched a video of two groups competing. The video was paused when it became clear that one of the groups was going to win. Children then watched as two members of the losing group spoke in counterbalanced order. One individual stated that she would like to win and, therefore, would leave her group in order to join the winning group (disloyal individual). The other individual stated that although she would like to win, she would stay with her group (loyal individual). Thus, the loyal person needed to sacrifice a personal benefit (winning) in order to remain loyal and stay with her group. Children were asked to judge the two individuals' niceness, trustworthiness, morality, and deservingness of a reward. Children at both ages favored the loyal over the disloyal individual, although this preference was more robust in the 5-year-olds.

Thus, we know that children positively evaluate loyal behavior, but we do not know whether they are loyal to the group themselves. Previous research has shown that even when children have knowledge of social norms, they do not necessarily follow them. For example, Smith, Blake, and Harris (2013) demonstrated that although 3- to 6-year-olds state that they and others should share equally, they themselves fail to do this when given the chance to share with another child (see also Blake, McAuliffe, & Warneken, 2014). To gain a fuller understanding of children's loyalty, therefore, it is

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